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New York

President: Ms. Al-Khalifa ..... (Bahrain)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Lieutenant General Mompati Merafhe, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Botswana.

Mr. Merafhe (Botswana): Let me begin by congratulating you, Madam, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. Your election is a demonstration of the trust and confidence placed in you and your country, the Kingdom of Bahrain, by the international community.

I would also seize this opportunity to pay tribute to your illustrious predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson of the Kingdom of Sweden, for his sound leadership and achievements during the sixtieth session.

Additionally, let me commend the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, for his decade of devoted and selfless service to humanity. This great son of Africa, with his visionary leadership of the United Nations, has provided, and continues to provide, the embodiment of our collective aspirations to achieve a more peaceful, just, equitable and prosperous world. He is indeed Africa's great gift to humanity.

Within the next five days, Botswana will mark 40 years of its existence as a democratic, independent and sovereign nation.

When the first President of Botswana, the late Sir Seretse Khama, addressed the Assembly on 24 September 1969, he described Botswana, in part, as a country faced with a problem of underdevelopment of classic proportions.

Botswana had to contend with the harsh realities of its history and geographical position. We were completely surrounded by oppressive, aggressive and racist white minority regimes. As a small, weak and poor country, we had to begin the process of building national institutions and laying the foundation for social and economic development in a very hostile environment. The United Nations and its Member States served as a pillar of strength and gave us political and diplomatic support.

Standing here today, we express our deep gratitude for the support and assistance extended to us over the years. It has been a 40-year journey of determined and sustained effort to achieve human-centred development.

It is a journey we have travelled with development partners from all continents. This has enabled us to achieve some measure of progress in improving the human condition. At 40, we are an adult nation and have assumed full ownership of and responsibility for our own development. We have adopted policies, legislation and practices aimed at

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creating an environment conducive to economic growth and development.

Many milestones have been achieved in our national development effort. Today, Botswana is a middle-income developing country, but we still face enormous challenges for which we need assistance. In this regard, the decision of the 2005 World Summit should be implemented to ensure that small middle-income developing countries such as Botswana do not fall back into the doldrums of poverty and underdevelopment.

Botswana has been blessed with one of Africa's major natural resources: diamonds. It must be stated that 65 per cent of the world's diamonds, worth $8.3 billion per year, come from African countries. I am pleased to state that diamonds have done, and continue to do, good in Botswana. The diamond industry in Botswana has been at the cutting edge of human development and is transforming lives for the better, in all fields of human endeavour.

We continue to prudently manage the revenue from the sale of diamonds and to effectively use such revenue to educate our people, provide potable water and health care and build an infrastructure network, including roads, telephones and rural electrification. This is the good that diamonds have done and continue to do.

As a participant in the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme, of which we currently hold the chairmanship, Botswana is strongly committed to working alongside other participating countries to maintain the credibility of the Scheme and the legitimate diamond trade. The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme is one of the best examples of global cooperation. The Scheme is the embodiment of global consensus, unrelenting political will and the determination of members to do the right thing, underpinned by strong support and the resolutions of the Security Council. That is important, because about 10 million people globally are either directly or indirectly supported by the diamond industry. In southern Africa, more than 28,000 people are employed by the industry.

We are also here to reaffirm our commitment to the Charter of the United Nations and our strong belief in the Organization as the only vehicle by means of which the enduring peace and prosperity of the human race can be assured. We welcome the opportunity for the nations of the world to meet here annually to exchange views on matters which are central to our common destiny.

There are many challenges which we must address. But chief among them is ending the evil of war. It is deeply regrettable that, although the human species left the jungle many, many years ago, the jungle remains in human beings. As a matter of fact, if the beasts of the jungle acquired language, they could actually claim some superiority over the human race. While animals may fight and brutally kill each other, they never spend time planning how to destroy one another or thinking about how to produce weapons of mass destruction.

Be that as it may, we still have hope and confidence in the human spirit to do good. As human beings, we have a shared destiny and we are therefore our own saviours.

The responsibility to save the human species from the scourge of war cannot be passed to anyone else. It is for that reason that we consider that this Assembly provides a rare opportunity for the international community to move beyond platitudes and to squarely address the critical challenges of our time.

An atmosphere of international peace and security is essential for human development. Experience has repeatedly shown that we cannot realistically hope to pursue a meaningful global development agenda under conditions of war, conflict and insecurity.

Conflicts in our world today should therefore be a matter of grave concern to all of us. In 2000, at the dawn of the new millennium, we gave an undertaking that, above all else, the twenty-first century should be an epoch of peace and prosperity. We consciously made a commitment to reduce by half by 2015 the number of the world's poor. If we are to achieve that objective, war should certainly be the first casualty.

Botswana is particularly concerned about conflicts in Africa. Regrettably, Africa is the only continent that is facing the bleak prospect of failing to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Can we really afford the resources for war in the midst of poverty, disease, deprivation and underdevelopment? The answer must obviously be a resounding "No".

Today, Africa is host to the largest number of refugees, displaced persons, global poor and people infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS. Yet, sadly, we have the lion's share of the world's conflicts. Ending conflicts is therefore as much a calling as it is a moral and political imperative.

We should all be concerned about the atrocities in the Darfur region of the Sudan. The perpetuation of that conflict, in defiance of the collective will of the international community and the Charter of the United Nations, is totally unacceptable. Worse still, the carnage of daily killings is an affront to the sanctity of human life. This undermines our humanity.

We call on all parties to the conflict to comply with and respect the Darfur Peace Agreement. Those who have not signed the Agreement must do so as a matter of urgency. It is only through dialogue and mutual accommodation that durable peace can be attained. War can beget only misery and anarchy.

The United Nations has expressed its desire to help, through the deployment of a multinational peacekeeping force. In principle, the African Union Peace and Security Council has welcomed the decision of the Security Council.

Every year we come to this rostrum to call for progress in the Middle East peace process. For generations that region has known no peace. If there is any lesson to be learned, it is that the only avenue to a lasting political settlement is through dialogue, accommodation and compromise. It is only in an atmosphere of negotiation that reason and common sense can prevail over extremism and war-mongering.

Israel and Palestine must coexist as sovereign States that share, not only a border, but a desire for peace, security and prosperity. We urge the people of the Middle East to summon up the courage to recognize the folly of war and accept the virtue of dialogue. They should start building a common future for generations that will know no violence and conflict, but only cooperation and concord.

My delegation shares the concern about the threat of terrorism. Terrorism pervades every crevice of our world, much to the detriment of humanity. In this respect, we welcome the recent adoption of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (resolution 60/288) by the General Assembly.

When the Doha Ministerial Declaration was adopted in 2001, we had hoped for and envisaged negotiations lasting three years. We knew then, as we know today, that that was an ambitious and onerous undertaking. We have already missed several important deadlines. That should be a source of concern for all of us. For many of our people, a fair and equitable international trading system is not only a noble objective, but also a development imperative. It holds hope and promise of prosperity and the alleviation of poverty, which is all the more reason why we must not allow the Doha round of trade negotiations to fail.

The indefinite suspension of the Doha round of trade negotiations on 24 July 2006 has raised questions about our collective commitment to development. In this respect, the major question before us today is how we can revive the Doha round of trade negotiations. It took eight years to complete the Uruguay round. That goes to show that at times it is not how fast the negotiations are concluded but the substance and content of such negotiations. It is clear that we are going to miss the December 2006 deadline which we set for ourselves in 2005.

It is therefore our collective responsibility as the United Nations to give the necessary political direction to the World Trade Organization, not only to revive the negotiations, but also to ensure the necessary impetus for their timely and successful conclusion. A successful conclusion should address the ever-growing special development challenges of developing countries by upholding the development dimension of the Doha round.

During the sixtieth session of the General Assembly, a number of key decisions were made and were outlined in the 2005 World Summit Outcome (resolution 60/1). Heads of State or Government called for the establishment of institutions with a view to making the United Nations more effective in carrying out its mandate under the Charter and in serving Member States better.

This session should be an implementation session; we must commit ourselves to collective implementation. It is important that we demonstrate in deeds that, here at the United Nations, we make statements to communicate thoughts, ideas and action plans. Such ideas are not to remain on paper; they must be translated into programmes and projects for the common good.

Botswana strongly supports comprehensive, wide and deep reform of the United Nations. Regarding the ongoing management reform, we welcome the decision, in resolution 60/283, to allow the Secretary-General adequate authority to deploy resources and staff from lower to higher priority programmes. We are convinced that as chief administrative officer, the Secretary-General should be accorded more leverage to command both human and financial resources so that the Secretariat can deliver more effectively. Member States must recognize the importance of timely and unconditional funding of the mandates entrusted to the Secretary-General by the legislative bodies of the Organization. It is incumbent upon the Secretariat to ensure accountability and the prudent management of such resources.

Enabling the Organization to effectively deliver is a collective responsibility of the Member States and the Secretariat. What is essential is for Member States to ensure that there are efficient oversight bodies to guarantee compliance with standing rules and regulations.

One of the major successes of the sixtieth session was the implementation of the World Summit decision on the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission. Africa expects the Peacebuilding Commission to effectively discharge its mandate.

The establishment of the Human Rights Council is also one of the significant achievements of the sixtieth session. It demonstrates our collective desire to elevate human rights to new heights of prominence and visibility consistent with the changing times. It is our expectation that the new body will operate on the basis of principles of cooperation, genuine interactive dialogue and tolerance coupled with respect for diversity. The importance of issues of development should not be underestimated. In developing countries, these issues are real challenges which should not be overlooked. The Human Rights Council must therefore address issues of capacity building and find ways of responding to institutional weaknesses and resource limitations which hamper the process of translating constitutional and statutory human rights provisions into reality.

Let me conclude by reaffirming Botswana's abiding faith in the utility and universality of the United Nations. The United Nations is nothing else but ourselves, the Member States, put together. It should be greater than the sum total of all of us. We must therefore have the courage to strengthen ourselves by following through with reforms, including the reform of the Security Council. The reform of the Security Council should not pose difficulties to anyone. We are all responsible for keeping this world safe.

It is only when Member States consider their national interests to be an integral part of the wider interests of the international community that they can set aside their apprehension with regard to a Security Council enlarged in both the permanent and non-permanent categories.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Come Zoumara, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Integration and la Francophonie of the Central African Republic.

Mr. Zoumara (Central African Republic) (*spoke in French*): As you know, Madam President, there is one African tradition, but its forms are many. That is why the African continent is the cradle of mankind and this African tradition universal. We can see this universal nature here in New York within this forum of the United Nations where the values of solidarity and brotherhood symbolize a common desire for peace and love.

How can we not fail today to recall the vitality which marked the World Summit which was held in 2005 in this very Hall, following the fifty-ninth session, which was undoubtedly the longest ever due to the intensity of the consultations begun by His Excellency Mr. Jean Ping, President at that session, with a view to reaching a consensus on questions related to reform of our Organization, including that of the Security Council. Those questions divided, and continue to divide, delegations and regional groups, and finally overshadowed the discussion of other items.

But the Summit and the ensuing sixtieth session nonetheless had the merit of establishing the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission.

Despite all the differences among United Nations Members and despite the criticism of some of its actions, the United Nations remains the international organization which, due to its universality, representativity and authority, cannot be ignored. The Central African Republic, which reiterates its commitment to the purposes and principles of the

Charter, would like to reaffirm its ongoing desire to continue to contribute to all efforts to reform the entire United Nations system.

Having said that, I should like, on behalf of His Excellency General François Bozizé, President of the Republic, head of State, and on behalf of the Government and the people of the Central African Republic, to warmly congratulate you, Madam, on your election as President of the General Assembly at the present session. I view it as a sign of confidence and a well-deserved tribute to your beautiful country, the Kingdom of Bahrain. I am also pleased to express to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, my high esteem for the remarkable way in which he led the work of the sixtieth session. In addition, I express my warm and sincere thanks and appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, a worthy son of the African tradition, for his praiseworthy and tireless efforts, in a particularly difficult international context, to promote the role of the Organization, to attain its objectives and to promote peace and security throughout the world.

The theme suggested for the present session is "Implementing a Global Partnership for Development". We should recall that, six years ago, the highest leaders of the Organization's Member States made the firm commitment to unite their efforts to collectively fight poverty and all the scourges it causes, which pose a serious threat to international peace and security and a major obstacle to the development processes in many countries.

In the Millennium Declaration, which resulted from that commitment, the 189 signatory countries — including the Central African Republic — solemnly pledged to do their utmost to overcome poverty, which continues to devastate the majority of the world's population. To that end, several Goals were defined.

Ms. Blum (Colombia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

As the Secretary-General has stated, the main Goals have been implemented to varying degrees:

> "Accordingly, we will not enjoy development without security, we will not enjoy security without development, and we will not enjoy either without respect for human rights. Unless all these causes are advanced, none will succeed" (*A/59/2005, para. 17*).

In the case of the Central African Republic, we must acknowledge that many challenges remain to be addressed if we are to truly strive to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) within the agreed time frame. Indeed, my country experienced more than two decades of serious crises, from which we only recently emerged by holding general elections and establishing republican institutions and the Government of National Reconciliation. But we must still fight the cross-border insecurity raging in the subregion and push back out of our territory the aggressors, supported from abroad, who seek to destroy our democratically established republican institutions.

The Central African authorities are striving to restore security throughout the territory. It goes without saying that no development is possible unless we eradicate the endemic insecurity maintained by those who set up roadblocks and by the rebellion raging mainly in the north-eastern part of the country, bordering on the Sudan and Chad. The security and defence forces deployed in the back country face many difficulties — particularly logistical ones — in overcoming that phenomenon. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the subregion — due to the long crisis in Darfur and its effects on the Central African Republic — are hardly helping to put an end to that scourge.

The Central African Republic supports the proposals made by Presidents George Bush and Jacques Chirac and by the Chairperson of the African Union, Mr. Denis Sassou Nguesso, on the positioning of United Nations troops on the border between the Central African Republic, Chad and the Sudan.

In addition, since 2003, the Central African Republic, one of the seven countries in partnership with the World Bank's Multi-country Demobilization and Reintegration Programme, has taken a new comprehensive, integrated approach that is integrative and inclusive aimed at resolving the thorny problem of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants. The results today reflect the Government's willingness to succeed in that process. Moreover, our country has just developed a new structure to fight the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, namely, a national commission against the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons and for disarmament.

The deteriorated state of the Central African economy is hardly likely to encourage the implementation of the Development Goals in order to promote a robust fight against poverty, which for us remains an ongoing threat to peace and stability.

In the area of finance, the Government has taken energetic measures to restore financial health by implementing an extensive system to monitor civil servants and establishing a body to verify their academic credentials.

The other challenges — just as great — facing the Central African Republic are those of health care and education, which are among the main MDGs. With respect to health care, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other diseases, such as tuberculosis and malaria, are sources of concern for our country.

The recent conference on AIDS, held here at United Nations Headquarters in early June 2006, highlighted the particularly disturbing characteristics of that calamity among the most impoverished sectors of the population: women and children. There is a health emergency, and thus the Central African Republic is requesting greater assistance and action from its development partners.

The education and training sector — covered by Goal 2 of the MDGs — has undoubtedly been the main victim of the long period of political and military crises, whose wounds are gradually healing. The many empty years of discouragement resulting from the loss of motivation on the part of the teaching staff, delayed salary payments, the lack of State resources to build schools and purchase equipment, and the continued insecurity in some areas of the country for the past several years — all of that has led to a decline in the quality of teaching and a drop in the literacy rate.

However, since the burst of patriotism of 15 March 2003, the Government has been doing its utmost to ensure that the school year will no longer be interrupted and to restore the former credibility of the Central African educational system. Thanks to the assistance of certain donors — among which we must mention the International Organization of la Francophonie — the Central African Republic is beginning to take up the challenge between now and 2015. Indeed, it will not be possible to ensure that democracy and a culture of dialogue and tolerance are firmly established unless the people have access to quality education and are able to grasp what is truly at stake, and thus make sound judgements in full knowledge of the facts.

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals Report 2005 highlights the need to ensure a sustainable environment by intelligently exploiting natural resources and protecting the ecosystems upon which the survival of humanity depends. Climate change and global warming owing to the depletion of the ozone layer are worrisome phenomena for our country, whose northern region is being increasingly overtaken by desert. The initiatives set out in the Kyoto Protocol show that progress is possible if there is political will on the part of the major consumers.

If we are to prevent and reduce the risks related to natural disasters and to equip ourselves with better organization and more effective means to make the world safer, we must support the transformation of the United Nations Environmental Programme into a specialized agency with a broader mandate, as proposed by France.

Despite delays in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Central African Republic is determined to reach them, especially Goals 3 and 4, relating to the empowerment of women and the promotion of gender equality and to the reduction of under-five mortality. Indeed, considerable progress has been made in terms of vaccination coverage and also with respect to the free distribution of mosquito nets to pregnant women and to children under the age of 5.

The Central African Republic greatly appreciates the proposals made during the 2005 World Summit by Presidents Chirac, Lula Da Silva and Hu Jintao regarding the promotion of peace, security and development.

However, the results of MDG implementation will remain mixed until international solidarity fully plays its part. We live in an interdependent world; the development of the Central African Republic is closely linked to that of the rest of the world, because the United Nations is a community of nations.

May God bless the United Nations. May God bless the Central African Republic.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Vartan Oskanian, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia.

Mr. Oskanian (Armenia): Let me congratulate Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa on her election to the presidency and wish her a year relatively free of conflict crisis and catastrophe — in other words, a year unlike the one we have just had, during which His Excellency Jan Eliasson significantly contributed to the successful navigation of troubled waters with his great leadership. The "year of turmoil", as he called it (see A/60/PV.100), included conflicts and crises, as well as man-made and natural disasters, all requiring our collective response. We have responded with great commitment to maintain peace and stability in the world.

Of the conflicts that we have faced in this past year, the one that emerged to be the most tragic was that of the war in Lebanon. I believe the international community has lost some credibility and moral authority in the eyes of the peoples of the world, who watched the Security Council bicker over minute issues while bombs were being dropped in Lebanon and innocent people were being killed. It was a great shame for the international community not to be able to deliver and establish an immediate ceasefire. When an international body loses moral authority, our ability to effectively tackle problems and issues that require a collective response is certainly undermined.

In other areas, however, the collective efforts of the international community have indeed succeeded. I believe we played a role in the civilized process of bringing Montenegro to this day and to this body. Collectively, we created and empowered the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council, two bodies that hold great promise for delivering deeper and more profound commitment on the part of the world community to building peace and protecting human rights.

The most threatening challenges in the world remain those of poverty and hopelessness. When our leaders gathered in this Hall six years ago, they decided that the United Nations was the most effective body in which to address the ills facing our societies. They collectively recognized their responsibility to deliver, worldwide, more equitably distributed social and economic development, at an accelerated pace. They said to the world that they were willing to channel international processes and multilateral resources in order to tackle the needs of the world's poor. They will be judged by their adherence to the principle, promise and commitment of collective action. Six years have now passed and the world still earnestly looks on to see whether individual and regional interests can be overcome and those problems jointly addressed.

We in Armenia also face similar problems. We are encouraged and rewarded by the extensive political and economic reforms that we have conducted over the past 10 years. The results are evident. We are now preparing to engage in the second generation of political and economic reforms in order to continue to build on the past decade of progress. We are moving forward on legislative and administrative matters; we are today a more democratic society and a more open and more liberal economy. We have been registering double-digit growth over the past six years.

While we are encouraged by this economic progress and the positive macroeconomic indicators, we are now turning our attention to the rural areas in order to eradicate poverty in our society. We are reminded of the remarkable promise, made in 2000, to the victims of global poverty to "free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty" (*resolution 55/2, para. 11*). To be able to do that in Armenia, we will leverage the philanthropy of international organizations and friendly countries with the traditional generosity of our diaspora, so that we can build and repair infrastructure and thus create new conditions for economic development and social change. But we also understand that infrastructure alone is not enough to introduce that kind of change that reduces poverty. We need to invest in people; we need to invest in women and children; and we need to educate them and train them for the future.

We will begin that programme in Armenia's border villages. Unlike other countries, where border villages are points of interaction and activity, Armenia's eastern and western borders are closed, thus stifling economic interaction and regional cooperation. With our neighbour, Turkey, it is not only economic cooperation that suffers, but also the dialogue between our two peoples. Turkey's insistence on keeping the border closed and not allowing interaction between the two communities freezes the memories of yesterday, instead of promoting dialogue and interaction to create new experiences and new memories for tomorrow. We still believe and hope that Turkey will eventually understand that keeping the border closed until there is harmony and mutual understanding between our two

peoples is not a policy. On the contrary, it is avoidance of a responsible policy to forge and promote regional cooperation and economic development at a time and in a region that are the object of growing global attention.

Let me address the issue of Kosovo, as many have done from this podium. We closely follow the process of self-determination in Kosovo because we Armenians, ourselves, are extremely supportive of the process of self-determination for the people of Nagorno Karabakh. But we do not draw parallels between the two conflicts or with any other conflict. We believe and insist that conflicts are all different, and each must be decided on its own merits. While we ourselves do not consider the Kosovo outcome to be a precedent for other conflicts, we are extremely anxious about the possibility that it may raise artificial obstacles for other self-determination movements, simply because others cite it as a precedent. This is of extreme concern to us because we believe that there are movements in the world today that have earned the right to self-determination. The Kosovo outcome should not serve as an excuse or reason to put a damper on those self-determination movements.

Yet, such attempts are already apparent in this Hall as the principle of self-determination is being undermined compared to other principles. But this goes contrary to the lessons of history. There is a reason that the Helsinki Final Act enshrined the principle of self-determination as equal among other principles in international relations. In international interactions, just as in human relations, there are no absolute values. There are also responsibilities. A State should gain and earn the right to govern. States have the responsibility to protect their own citizens, and the people have the right to choose the Government that they think should govern them.

The people of Nagorno Karabakh decided long ago not to be represented by the Government of Azerbaijan, because they suffered from State violence. They tried to protect themselves, and they succeeded against all odds, only to hear the State cry foul and claim sovereignty and territorial integrity. But Azerbaijan has lost every iota of the moral right to talk about guaranteeing the security of the people of Nagorno Karabakh, let alone to claim custody over that people.

Azerbaijan did not act responsibly or morally towards the people of Nagorno Karabakh, people that it considered to be its own citizens. It unleashed military action; it sanctioned pogroms and massacres in urban areas. It bombed and displaced more than 300,000 Armenians. When it lost the war and accepted a ceasefire, it began to destroy all traces of Armenians by eliminating Armenian monuments throughout the territory. Over the past two years, the remaining 2,000 carved stone crosses, representing Armenian cemeteries, were desecrated and eliminated. The territory has now been turned into a shooting range for the Azerbaijani army. This reflects the fact that Azerbaijan still does not believe in the peaceful resolution of this conflict.

Armenians cannot be blamed for thinking that Azerbaijan is not serious about a peaceful solution. Having rejected the past two offers of the international community, Azerbaijan is now concerned about being accused of rejecting the current peace plan. That is why it is manoeuvring and manipulating every possible situation — from State violence to introducing resolutions in other forums outside the peace process so that the Armenians are forced to do the rejecting.

But Armenia is clearly on record as stating that it stands by every single principle included in the document it submitted. However, in order to give a chance to that document, one cannot think or even pretend to think that there is a military option to this conflict. There is no military option. That option has been tried and has failed. The only option today is realism and compromise. The path that the people of Nagorno Karabakh have chosen over the past two decades is a path that has become irreversible. Solidifying and formalizing the process will greatly contribute to peace and stability in our region.

Karabakh is not a cause. It is an ancient place, a beautiful garden with people who have earned the right to live in peace and prosperity. That is what we seek, and we cannot accept anything less.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Morshed Khan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh.

Mr. Khan (Bangladesh): I extend my delegation's sincerest congratulations to the President on her very well-deserved election. I would like to congratulate her predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, on his stewardship of the historic sixtieth session of the

Assembly and to pay a special tribute to the Secretary-General for his dedicated service to the Organization over the past decade. It is also my pleasure to welcome Montenegro as the newest Member of our Organization.

The Assembly is meeting against a backdrop of dire human tragedy. The recent wanton Israeli aggression in Lebanon has shocked the world. Most disconcerting has been the fact that the international community failed to respond promptly and effectively, as colossal devastation wrecked Lebanon and the Lebanese people. In the end, the Security Council redeemed itself by ordering a ceasefire in Lebanon. Let us hope that the Security Council will exercise its mandated responsibilities so that such atrocities and violations of human rights do not occur in the future under any pretext.

Alongside Lebanon, the dire situation in Palestine has worsened owing to the continuous use of disproportionate force by the Israeli Government. We call upon the international community to make sincere efforts to put the peace process back on track.

The scourge of terrorism knows no boundaries. It is professed and carried out by a handful, and the vast majority of victims are innocent men, women and children. Efforts to combat terrorism and its protagonists globally and nationally may have seen some positive results. However, action to combat terror by individual countries has created divisions between peoples and affected interfaith harmony. Many individuals are being subjected to racial or religious profiling, which foments suspicion, misunderstanding and even hatred. That is what the terrorists are actually looking for: to divide the nations of the world. We must ensure that they do not have their way.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia has unequivocally declared that Bangladesh abjures religious extremism and does not and will not support any kind of militancy. The Prime Minister has reasserted her Government's vow to eliminate all militants and their networks. She has called for the passage of tough laws to punish the perpetrators, whom she has repeatedly dubbed enemies of Islam, enemies of democracy, development, humanity and the people of the country — our country, beloved Bangladesh.

In this connection, I must mention that a small group of extremists carried out a country-wide bombing attack on 17 August last year in Bangladesh. But the extremists underestimated the will of the Government and the people of Bangladesh. Instead of fear, there was anger. The Government mobilized all available resources to relentlessly hunt down the leaders and the operatives. I am proud to inform the Assembly that we have been able to bring all the leaders of the outlawed militant group to justice.

Bangladesh today is what it has always been: a moderate, tolerant society that practises democracy and where the equal rights of each and every citizen are preserved. Our determined action did not allow the opportunists and the perpetrators of terror to destroy the values of democracy and tolerance that we treasure most.

For smaller States, the United Nations remains the premier world body, addressing the challenges they face. Despite its shortcomings, the United Nations has proved invaluable in times of crisis and in the tasks of preserving global peace and security and promoting sustainable development.

At present, we are seized of the issue of reform of the United Nations. Bangladesh holds that reform is a process and not an end in itself. We do not think that arbitrary deadlines or pressure in order to obtain a particular outcome are helpful. It is our belief that, for meaningful reform, an environment of mutual trust, confidence and respect for divergent positions is indispensable.

We trust that the new Human Rights Council will not be a mere replication of the Commission on Human Rights. It must not indulge in politicization of its work. Bangladesh, as an elected member, is committed to advancing the work of the Council in a fair and balanced manner.

We hope, too, that the newly constituted Peacebuilding Commission will fill the existing institutional gap in the United Nations system to facilitate the transition from peacekeeping to peacebuilding. Bangladesh, being one of the largest contributors to United Nations peacekeeping operations, will bring its experience to the work of the Commission in all its aspects.

As the United Nations deals with individual post-conflict situations, it must not lose sight of wider issues, such as disarmament and small-arms proliferation, as well as weapons of mass destruction.

Bangladesh would like to see sustained efforts by the United Nations in these very critical areas.

The Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit (resolution 60/1), which had development as its centrepiece, has hardly progressed beyond mere pledges. For the least developed countries (LDCs), the savings-investment gap and lack of capital remain the primary constraints to development. Official development assistance (ODA) to the LDCs in 2004, according to the most recent data available, amounted to $23.8 billion, or $35.70 per person living in these countries. This is certainly not sufficient to complement income or boost investment. Faster growth in exports, and the consequent rise in income, could help the LDCs accumulate the resources needed for development. For this, we would need unhindered market access for all LDC exports. The Doha development round must resume to ensure special and differential treatment for the LDCs. We would also need increased ODA, full debt cancellation, foreign direct investment and transfer of technology to enhance the global partnership for development.

We can also increase capital flows to LDCs by addressing one of the fundamental inequities in the global financial system. It is utterly inefficient and unfair that the LDCs cannot utilize their own foreign exchange reserves — a staggering $28 billion — to finance their own development efforts and that these reserves yield very low interest, or none at all. On the other hand, when LDCs borrow against their own reserves, they pay a huge premium in interest or service charges. The United Nations system must lead the international effort to reform the global reserve system and to make arrangements that enable the LDCs to borrow at a zero mark-up of the interest rate against their own foreign exchange reserves.

The General Assembly has just concluded the midterm comprehensive review of the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the LDCs. In this context, I would like to point out that, unless duty-free and quota-free market access for all LDC products is ensured, the agreed development goals and targets will remain unattained for a long time to come. We call on the developed countries to fulfil their pledges of support for the framework to facilitate aid for trade, to which they have committed many times over. An effective monitoring capacity under the auspices of the United Nations can significantly facilitate this task.

Let me now turn to two issues that are of particular concern to Bangladesh. I begin with migration. Liberalizing the movement of labour can generate significant benefits and a win-win result for both sending and receiving countries, as well as for the migrants themselves. Numerous studies have found that a modest commitment under the World Trade Organization's General Agreement on Trade in Services Mode 4 would offer substantial welfare gains for both developing and developed countries. It may even exceed the gain of complete market liberalization in merchandise trade.

The second issue is the threat of natural disasters, which often undermine our development efforts. The Asian tsunami was a wake-up call for all of us. In these times of increasing global interdependence, disaster risk management is a matter of global concern, as the impact of a disaster in one region adversely affects others. Bangladesh has advanced considerably in the field of comprehensive disaster management. We stand ready to share our experience, which has been internationally recognized as the best-practice model. The United Nations must gear its efforts to introduce weather insurance and weather derivatives to manage the risks of natural disasters, especially in developing countries.

Within weeks of her assumption to power five years ago with a massive mandate from our people, the Government of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia launched a reform programme to restore discipline in our country. Thanks to our relentless efforts, we could accelerate the growth momentum remarkably without destabilizing our macroeconomic fundamentals.

After maintaining a growth rate of 6 per cent for the past five years, we expect a growth rate of 6.7 per cent this fiscal year, against the backdrop of a global economic slowdown. Given natural disasters, political unrest and many external shocks — such as the global economic recession, the phasing out of the Multifibre Arrangement and the oil price hike — that affect our economies, that is a remarkable achievement.

Keeping our commitment to the Millennium Declaration, we have already achieved two Millennium Development Goals by ensuring access to safe drinking water and removing gender disparity in primary and secondary education. Enrolment in primary education has been ensured for 97 per cent of our children. Of course, there is no complacency on our part and we

know that we should try to achieve 100 per cent enrolment in our primary schools.

Apart from those achievements, Bangladesh has achieved remarkable success in the reduction of child and maternal mortality and malnutrition and in improving food security. We have begun channelling resources to targeted programmes in the light of our Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. Our development efforts, however sincere, will not reach their goals or even see the light of day unless they are complemented by international support.

Bangladesh has been pursuing meaningful regional cooperation to improve the socio-economic conditions of South and South-East Asia. As the current Chair of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and as members of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, the Asia Cooperation Dialogue and the Developing Eight Countries, Bangladesh has demonstrated its commitment to working with other countries of the region. We are working in total harmony with the nations of our region. Our recent partnership in the Regional Forum of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations bears testimony to our commitment.

The present Government will complete its tenure towards the end of next month and will hand over power to a neutral caretaker Government in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution. We very much hope to return to work again with the General Assembly. We have had peaceful transfers of power over the past three elections under neutral caretaker Governments when the voters exercised their franchise freely and without fear or intimidation. The system has worked and has been accepted by the people. Democracy has taken firm root in our country and the next general election will be one more opportunity for the people to demonstrate that they are the ultimate source of power.

I end with the assurance that we will work together for a better tomorrow for future generations.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Talbak Nazarov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan.

Mr. Nazarov (Tajikistan) (*spoke in Russian*): It gives me great pleasure to join in the warm congratulations to Sheikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa upon her assumption of the office of President of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. We are confident that her extensive professional and life experience will be instrumental in addressing the issues faced by the General Assembly.

Tajikistan also welcomes the accession of Montenegro to the United Nations. On this occasion, on behalf of the Government of our country, I would like to extend our sincere congratulations to the Government and people of that friendly State.

A year has passed since the historic Summit confirmed the common views of the international community on the key issues of our time and on the United Nations as the universal international Organization whose goals and objectives are focused on the collective search for answers to the questions of concern to the entire international community. The leaders of our States declared that only strict compliance with the United Nations Charter, a comprehensive collective approach and mutual trust can ensure international security and development. The latest developments in the Middle East have proved once again the need to enhance the coordinating role of the United Nations in addressing global and regional issues.

Tajikistan is in favour of further strengthening the United Nations and lends its overall support to the process of its ongoing reform. As for Security Council reform, it should be undertaken by consensus, with due consideration for the interests of all Member States.

We believe that it was broad consensus that made possible such major accomplishments as the holding of the first session of the Human Rights Council, the launching of the Democracy Fund and the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund. Of special importance was the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission, whose objective is also to sustain peace and development in post-conflict countries.

The Government of Tajikistan was among those that actively advocated the establishment of an efficient United Nations body of that kind — one that would focus on issues of coordination and targeted support for countries emerging from armed conflict. Tajikistan's painful but ultimately successful transition from civil war to peace convincingly demonstrated the need for an international peacebuilding agency to assist the Security Council and other United Nations bodies

in their efforts to accelerate the rehabilitation of countries emerging from crisis and to create guarantees for the non-recurrence of such conflicts.

Stable peace prevails in Tajikistan today, and national accord and respect for political pluralism have been achieved. The complex process of establishing democracy is under way, and all political forces involved are aware of their ever-increasing responsibility for the fate of our country. In compliance with the Constitution and valid legal procedures, new effective Government institutions are being successfully built. Respect for the law is increasingly the rule rather than the exception. Civil society is developing at an accelerated pace. Citizens determine their own destiny through active participation in the life of the State. The forthcoming presidential elections, scheduled for November 2006, will be an important milestone on the road towards peace and will open a new page in the history of the establishment of Tajik statehood.

In Tajikistan, as in the majority of United Nations Member States, the issue of sustainable development ranks among our top priorities. Today, we are fully aware of how instrumental the United Nations agenda has been in enhancing sustainable development and eradicating poverty, epidemics, famine and illiteracy the world over. At the same time, the implementation of a large-scale programme to achieve the Millennium Development Goals will require not only extra effort, but also considerable financing. In that regard, we expect tangible results from the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development.

In that connection, we highly value the outcome of the United Nations High-level Dialogue recently held in New York, which helped States concerned with issues of migration to reach constructive mutual understanding. Migration has been an issue of vital importance to our country since the outbreak of the civil war, when a part of the Tajik population had to leave the country. I would like to emphasize the special role and capacity of the United Nations in strengthening international cooperation in the field of migration and development. In this regard, Tajikistan is resolved to achieve as much progress as possible in implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In recent years, tangible progress has been achieved in the implementation of a number of goals, and the foundation has been laid for enhancing efforts in this area.

But long-term stability in Central Asia in the years to come is inseparable from the development of regional integration.

Currently, vast opportunities are emerging in the Central Asian region for the implementation of large-scale economic projects, the creation of a unified market of commodities and services and the establishment of conditions for attracting capital investment. Potential foreign investors see Central Asia as a single entity; and, primarily, as a common market.

Economic integration will become a powerful factor in the sustainable development of the region and will bring about the reduction of poverty and the improvement of well-being. For this reason, Tajikistan will continue to stand for strengthening of ties and the expansion of mutually advantageous cooperation among the States of the region.

The current positive processes in Afghanistan also create favourable conditions for regional cooperation in implementing transportation and communication projects which will provide the region with access to the southern seaports. The creation of new multi-modal transport corridors and the revival of the Great Silk Road routes will form a unified interconnected system of communications and make it possible for Central Asian States to gain access to promising markets.

It is also obvious that in many respects the attainment of the MDGs depends on assistance rendered by the international community to developing countries. Tajikistan joins the request addressed to the donor community to at least double the amount of assistance provided for the purposes of long-term development. The process of exchanging the debts of developing countries for national projects in the field of sustainable development remains an urgent issue.

One of our planet's major assets is the fresh water indispensable for sustaining life. Our common goal in this respect is to develop qualitatively new patterns for the sustainable management of water resources and for addressing water-related economic issues at the national, regional and international levels. This can be achieved through a combination of appropriate support from the international community and national efforts,

with the leading role being played by countries and regions faced with the water-resource problems.

In this regard, Tajikistan hopes for the continued active involvement of the Member States in the activities of the International Decade for Action, "Water for Life", 2005-2015, including the successful holding of the International Freshwater Forum in Dushanbe in 2010. In order to coordinate activities in this area the Government of Tajikistan is establishing the National Water Committee. It will monitor progress and develop effective ways of attaining the goals of the water Decade at the national, regional and global levels through cooperation with the countries and international organizations concerned. Our efforts in the area of water are part and parcel of the strategic programme for the attainment of the MDGs.

It is well known that international terrorism, transnational organized crime and illegal drug trafficking obstruct sustainable development. Tajikistan believes that the United Nations and its Security Council provide a unique opportunity for the development and implementation of joint measures to confront international terrorism and the narcotics threat. We entirely support the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Uniting against terrorism: recommendations for a global counter-terrorism strategy", and we view the outlined principles for confronting new challenges and risks as major instruments for counteracting those threats.

The response of the international community to the complex strategic threat of terrorism must also be comprehensive. The community of nations must intensify its efforts to counteract the instigation of acts of terror, the spread of terrorism ideology, extremism and separatism, religious and ethnic intolerance and hostility, and the financing of terrorism.

Universalizing and improving an international legal framework to counter terrorism remains an urgent issue. The speedy approval of the draft comprehensive convention on international terrorism will serve the interests of all countries and peoples in the United Nations community. Tajikistan will continue to support the strengthening of the United Nations as the core institution in this area.

The global system for counteracting terrorism currently being shaped cannot be established without the involvement of regional and subregional organizations. This should be taken into account when adopting measures aimed at combating any manifestations of extremism and violence at the regional and global levels. We regard participation of regional structures in this process as one of the major prerequisites for ensuring collective security. Among the structures of this nature in our region are the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

We believe that long-term success in combating terrorism and religious extremism depends on the elimination of the deep-rooted causes of these negative phenomena, generated by social and economic problems in the society. Prevention of illegal drug trafficking, which, to a certain extent, serves as a breeding ground for terrorism and international crime, must become part and parcel of our common struggle against terrorism. In this regard I would like to reiterate that Tajikistan is prepared to continue a constructive dialogue and cooperation with the aim of establishing an efficient global partnership to counteract the narcotics threat.

It must be said that current efforts at counteracting the narcotics threat are not sufficiently effective. For this reason, we believe that financial and technical assistance to Afghanistan, to be rendered within targeted programmes, and the creation of a modern, efficient and capable Afghan border service to safeguard the external borders, including the Afghan-Tajik border, would be a worthy application of the efforts of the international community in this area. Also, within the anti-narcotics partnership, we suggest enhanced interaction with the Afghan structures with the purpose of adopting joint measures to prevent drug trafficking across the Afghan-Tajik border. We are convinced that these measures could serve as a basis for the proposed establishment of the first section of the security belt around Afghanistan. Involvement in the constructive process of Afghanistan's neighbours and factoring in the regional aspects of the post-conflict rehabilitation of that country may well be key to the success of the efforts undertaken by the international community.

Today, the regional dimension becomes one of the key factors of long-term development. Broad and constructive regional economic cooperation in Central Asia, which possesses considerable natural resources, is of particular importance at the present juncture. We believe that achieving that goal could enable Central

Asia to become self-sufficient in terms of energy, fuel and food supply and a dynamic, developing region of the world. Therefore, we believe that the achievement of the MDGs should hold a place in the new structure of global security currently being shaped, and become one of the tools for addressing new challenges and threats. Today, as never before, it is becoming increasingly obvious that a security policy needs to be integrated into development.

The scale of the challenges facing the international community dictates the need to further strengthen our Organization. There is no doubt that we must do everything we can to make the United Nations more effective in dealing with issues of international security. The collective approach should keep us from making hasty and emotional decisions, since we are dealing with the Organization responsible for collective security, sustainable development and protection of human rights. It is with the United Nations, despite some of its imperfections, that humanity places its hope for a peaceful and just world order, for tangible achievements in the fields of combating poverty and natural disasters. A responsible attitude towards the United Nations is in the interests of each and every Member State.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Vladimir Norov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Mr. Norov (Uzbekistan) (*spoke in Russian*): While acknowledging the unique and irreplaceable role played by the United Nations in international affairs, one still has to recognize the need to reform this institution according to present-day realities. Let me briefly dwell upon our vision of these reforms.

It is necessary to significantly increase the efficiency of the United Nations management, which must set itself realistic and feasible objectives and rapidly respond to challenges and threats. The reform of the Organization must reflect the principles of sovereign equality and non-interference in internal affairs and strengthen the equal cooperation between States. It must be based upon the principles of broad international consensus.

The General Assembly needs to concentrate on designing constructive ways of addressing the problems of regional and global security, which affect the interests of the majority of the Member States. Much attention should be given to questions of post-conflict rehabilitation and combating terrorism. The United Nations should assume a coordinating role in these spheres using the support of all Member States. Such an approach will contribute to strengthening the Organization's ability to meet contemporary challenges.

Security Council reform must ensure the fair geographical and regional representation of both developed and developing States whose authority has been acknowledged by the international community and who play an important role in addressing the main tasks facing the Organization today.

The international community is about to make a decision on an important issue — the election of the new Secretary-General. Considering the principle of rotation and the increasing political weight and economic significance of the Asian countries, the Republic of Uzbekistan fully supports the view that a representative from the Asian group should assume that post. We support the candidature of the Minister forForeign Affairs and Trade of South Korea, Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

The international community places its hopes on the newly established Human Rights Council, which is called upon to improve the work of the United Nations in the field of human rights. It is important not to allow the Council to be used as a tool for promoting the interests of certain countries to the detriment of others. Only by stopping the practice of double standards, politicization and confrontation can we turn that body into the forum for equal and open dialogue, enjoying the trust of all Member States. The work of that United Nations body must be guided by objective and unbiased assessment of human rights issues. It must assist in elaborating constructive solutions to all problems that arise, instead of being used for political purposes.

The fundamental changes in today's world are accompanied by the emergence of new challenges and threats. At present, terrorism, extremism and drug aggression pose a great danger to the sustainable development of States and peoples of the world.

The principal approaches of the Republic of Uzbekistan towards addressing these and other problems of security include the following points.

Uzbekistan firmly supports the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (*resolution 60/288*),

adopted by the General Assembly on 8 September 2006. Terrorism is not acceptable in any of its forms and manifestations. The fight against terrorism can be effective and efficient only by eliminating its causes, the first of which is the ideological and extremist centres that finance and direct the forces of international terrorism. We must also design common approaches to assessing this, the most dangerous phenomenon of today's world.

A universal convention on international terrorism could become an effective basis for joint counteraction against the threat of terrorism. This instrument must be of a non-discriminatory nature, exclude the policy of double standards and call upon States for concerted action in countering the ideologies of extremism.

Maintenance of regional and global security is not possible without establishing comprehensive peace and stability in Afghanistan. One way to resolve the Afghan problem and restore a peaceful and neutral Afghanistan is effective and real progress in implementing concrete projects, funded by the international community, in the social, economic and humanitarian spheres — those spheres that can affect attitudes among the long-suffering people of Afghanistan.

A fundamental strategy review and more efficient coordination are required in combating one of the most dangerous problems: drug production and drug trafficking.

Uzbekistan, as an initiator of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region, together with its neighbours, is doing everything possible to strengthen the global nuclear non-proliferation regime. On 8 September 2006 in Semipalatinsk, the Central Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treat was signed. That initiative, put forward by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, is a concrete contribution of the States in the region to strengthening the global non-proliferation process and also to creating a solid system of regional security. Uzbekistan calls upon nuclear powers to accede to the protocol on security guarantees annexed to the Central Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty as soon as possible. I wish to take this opportunity to express gratitude to the United Nations for its assistance in realizing this initiative.

Mr. Sow (Guinea), Vice-President, took the Chair.

In closing, I express my sincere hope that the results of the work of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session will contribute to the successful realization of the joint efforts of the Member States in the struggle against threats and challenges to global security and to furthering the peaceful development of peoples.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Fiorenzo Stolfi, Minister for Foreign and Political Affairs and Economic Planning of the Republic of San Marino.

Mr. Stolfi (San Marino) (*spoke in Italian: English text provided by the delegation*): On behalf of the Government and the people of the Republic of San Marino, I wish to congratulate Her Excellency Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa on her election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. I am confident that her abilities and expertise will be key to the success of this session. Along with my satisfaction on the election to such a high position of a woman after so many years, I add my best wishes.

I also wish to thank the outgoing President, Mr. Jan Eliasson, for his valuable work and total commitment and resolve in implementing the reform programme started by the Secretary-General.

The Republic of San Marino firmly believes that the role of the United Nations needs strengthening in order to enable the Organization to operate as efficiently as possible and with optimal coordination among its bodies. With special reference to the General Assembly, the most important decision-making body of the United Nations, San Marino believes that it should focus more closely on the actual implementation of its resolutions and create mechanisms to make its decisions more binding.

For the small and medium-sized countries that represent the majority of the Member States, the revitalization of the General Assembly — the main and sometimes only forum in which they can make their voice heard — is essential. Indeed, the General Assembly is the organ that fully implements the principles of democracy and equal representation upon which this Organization is founded.

There is no doubt that Security Council reform is the other major objective of the United Nations. San Marino believes that it is necessary to resume dialogue. In our opinion, the new Security Council should be

founded upon a flexible base so that it can adjust appropriately to future changes. The enlargement and democratization of the Council can only improve peace processes and thereby the defence of the weakest Member States.

San Marino also expresses its deep satisfaction with the new Human Rights Council, which is already fully operational. We hope that there will be a clear division of tasks between the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly in order to avoid duplication and ensure complementarity and efficiency in a balanced relationship and mutual independence.

San Marino followed with great interest the intense negotiations leading to the adoption on 30 June of the resolution on the follow-up to the 2005 World Summit, including the Millennium Development Goals, and fully endorses the call of the President of the Assembly to focus attention at this general debate on setting up a global partnership for development. That goal is a fundamental step towards the eradication of poverty and the achievement of the other Millennium Goals. To do so, however, cooperation at all levels is essential and San Marino is ready to make its own concrete contribution.

The development goals are also the key points of the programme that San Marino will present when it assumes the chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in mid-November. During its chairmanship, which is extremely important to the Republic, San Marino will also address other global issues, such as intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

The Republic of San Marino, in line with its centuries-old history of peace, democracy and freedom, is particularly sensitive to the need, in today's international context characterized by growing tensions and violent contrasts, to promote dialogue among cultures and religions based on respect for diversity and universally recognized human rights.

In that regard, I wish to reiterate the determination of the Government and institutions of San Marino to guarantee all possible support to the international community for the achievement of those objectives. It is in that spirit that my country has consistently demonstrated its solidarity with the most disadvantaged people and circumstances and has acceded to legal instruments particularly important to the promotion and achievement of international cooperation in the search for dialogue and the affirmation of the principles of tolerance and understanding. Thus, intercultural and interreligious dialogue constitutes the basis of any peace process and the most powerful tool to reject all forms of extremism, which unfortunately, as we know, often turns into terrorism.

During our chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, to begin in November, I will seek to organize a meeting with the Assembly on that important subject.

In that context, we cannot but think of the Middle East, in particular the situation in Lebanon, where the United Nations is committed to a new difficult peace mission, which we sincerely hope will have a successful outcome. Only a year ago, San Marino expressed from this rostrum its confidence and hope in the peace process and in the good will of the parties involved in the protracted conflict. After a series of violent attacks, mostly against civilians and innocent people, as always, the only achievement so far has been an unstable ceasefire. To help alleviate that suffering, San Marino has decided, in line with its centuries-old tradition of solidarity, to offer a special contribution for humanitarian aid in Lebanon.

San Marino has welcomed with great satisfaction the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission as the ideal institutional response to post-conflict situations. The history of my country is deeply rooted in the values of peaceful coexistence among all peoples, and the newly elected Government has decided to include in its programme, for the first time, a specific mandate for peace. The objective is to promote, also in collaboration with volunteer associations and by supporting international cooperation, any useful initiative to affirm and safeguard that important objective.

Therefore, the institutions of San Marino, in response to the United Nations appeal, decided to celebrate the International Day of Peace on 21 September. That occasion was also marked by the opening of a public subscription to raise funds for the victims of conflicts to be devolved to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

My country will guarantee its active support for the Pan-European Campaign on Violence against Women, in particular domestic violence, which will be launched during San Marino's chairmanship of the

Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, in parallel with the celebration of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Moreover, it will strongly support the development of the Council of Europe programme "Building a Europe for and with Children".

Another particularly important occasion will be the participation of San Marino in the United Nations Global Youth Leadership Summit, which will examine the contribution of young people to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, with particular reference to sport, development and peace, and will provide the youth organizations with the necessary guidelines for future action.

San Marino greatly appreciates the successful outcome of the work of the group established to draft an international convention on the protection of persons with disabilities. Indeed, my country is becoming increasingly aware of and attentive to the problems and rights of disabled people. In this regard, only two weeks ago, the San Marino Parliament approved an agenda inviting the Government to sign and ratify the Convention as soon as possible and to take measures in support of the principles contained therein.

Let me underscore how, despite all the difficulties and divisions, the United Nations still demonstrates its ability to put in place all initiatives and activities which are at the core of its very existence. It is, therefore, a duty for all States to keep alive the flame of ideals and the determination that constitute the foundations of the Organization's identity and, at the same time, the crucial point of reference for all of our actions, both at the national level and also in terms of international cooperation.

Prompted by this conviction, and strongly committed to guaranteeing a constant and constructive contribution, we would like to express our best wishes to the President, to the Secretary-General — to whom we reiterate our most sincere appreciation and highest esteem for his dedicated commitment during these years at the helm of the United Nations — and to all colleagues and representatives who share the same conviction.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Saleh Said Meky, Minister of Health of Eritrea.

Mr. Meky (Eritrea): On behalf of the Government and people of the State of Eritrea, I avail myself of this opportunity to extend to Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa, and to the Government and people of the Kingdom of Bahrain, my sincere congratulations on her election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. I also wish to express our appreciation to Mr. Jan Eliasson of Sweden, who presided over the sixtieth session of the Assembly, for his dedication and skilful leadership during the past year.

For reasons of brevity, I do not wish to dwell on generic themes of global economic development, United Nations reforms and other issues of interest that have been addressed comprehensively by many speakers with whom we share similar views. I shall instead focus on cardinal issues of peace and security that remain of paramount importance to my country and the Horn of Africa region as a whole.

In this respect, allow me, Sir, to bring to the attention of this Assembly, for the umpteenth time, Ethiopia's reckless flouting of international law that is threatening peace and security in our region. It is painful for my Government to harp on the same theme at every Assembly session for the past four years. But these are the sad facts of a perilous reality imposed on my country. In the event, we are duty bound to press for and exhaust all legal processes to stave off dangerous consequences before it is too late.

As the Assembly is aware, demarcation of the boundary between Eritrea and Ethiopia remains stalled, more than four years after the legal award, owing to Ethiopia's rejection of the final and binding arbitration decision. Ethiopia's conduct is contrary to the terms and conditions of the Algiers Peace Agreement. Indeed, article 4.15 of the Agreement stipulates as follows:

> "The parties agree that the delimitation and demarcation determinations of the Commission shall be final and binding. Each Party shall respect the border so determined, as well as the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the other party".

It must be stressed that there is no equivocation or ambiguity in the general provisions of this Agreement. Yet, Ethiopia has violated the core of the Algiers Peace Agreement with impunity. And, it has continued to occupy, by force, the sovereign territory of a United Nations Member State for the past four

years, in violation of that Agreement and Article 2, paragraph 4, of the United Nations Charter.

How and why did this happen?

To single out Ethiopia as the primary and only culprit would be missing the forest for the woods. The fact is that Ethiopia has neither the power nor the political skill to defy international law for even a single day, let alone for four long years. If it has done so for the past four years, it is simply because its unlawful conduct has been, and continues to be, encouraged and supported by certain Powers in the Security Council.

This poignant state of affairs is best exemplified by the following three instances. First, when three years ago, in September 2003, Ethiopia's Prime Minister sent an ominous letter to the Security Council announcing his Government's blatant rejection of the Boundary Commission decision and calling for a "new mechanism" outside the Commission to overrule the legal award, the Secretary-General and the Council chose to accommodate Ethiopia's unlawful conduct. This happened in spite of the fact that the Council is the main guarantor of the Algiers Peace Agreement and has treaty obligations to maintain the integrity of the legal decision. It must be recalled that the Council is explicitly empowered, by article 14 of the same agreement, to invoke Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter to ensure compliance by the parties.

As it happened, the Secretary-General and the Council opted for the wrong path and appointed a Special Envoy, in contravention of the legal agreement. The demarcation process has thus been stymied for the past four years at huge financial cost to the international community and inestimable cost in terms of lost opportunity and heightened tension for the peoples of Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Secondly, when this Special Envoy scheme proved unworkable, the United States Government employed its full diplomatic clout to unlawfully alter and modify the legal Award under the rubric of a "new initiative". This time around, the United States dropped all pretensions of influencing the demarcation process from without, through an external envoy wearing a United Nations mantle. The current plan consists of directly planting a senior expert as an adjunct to the Boundary Commission and bestowing on him wide powers to alter the decision in the process of demarcation.

Washington's package further envisages creating a new and political appellate body — outside the Boundary Commission — to accommodate Ethiopia's additional requests in case of dissatisfaction with the "alterations" that would be implemented through the services of the expert. This United States "diplomatic" scheme, which in effect renders fundamental tenets of the Algiers Peace Agreement null and void, has been tailored to fully address Ethiopia's request for an extrajudicial mechanism when it rejected the Boundary Commission decision in September 2003.

From the foregoing, one can only surmise that Ethiopia's original rejection of the award must have been tacitly supported by Washington from the outset. The United States Government has even resorted to a series of measures against my Government with the apparent purpose of furthering this aim. In this connection, I wish to refer particularly to the seizure of financial and other assets of our Embassy in Washington by the United States Homeland Security Department in contravention of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and to avail myself of this occasion to lodge a complaint on behalf of my Government and to solicit the support of the international community for redress and restitution.

Thirdly, the semi-annual and other periodic reports of the Secretariat to the Security Council have invariably tended to downplay Ethiopia's violation of the Algiers Peace Agreement and the Charter of the United Nations. These reports have often tended to apportion equal blame to both parties without differentiation and, particularly in the last two years, to impugn Eritrea alone. In this regard, Security Council resolution 1640 (2005), which the Security Council adopted in December last year, went so far as to threaten imposing punitive measures against Eritrea, ostensibly for curbing the freedom of movement of the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), while overlooking Ethiopia's refusal to accept unconditionally the final and binding decision of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC).

This unlawful conduct by Ethiopia is indeed threatening to unravel the peace process as a whole. We can also cite various instances in which the United Nations Secretariat went out of its way to downplay unacceptable excesses and infringements of Eritrea's sovereignty by UNMEE staff and to blame my Government instead of taking appropriate remedial measures. Incidentally, whether the huge annual

financial outlays for the sustenance of UNMEE are really justified and provide value for money spent remains a critical matter that requires thorough scrutiny and auditing.

For us, these concerted unwarranted acts belie an overarching theme. The solemn pledges that we have heard on this podium from leaders of major Powers on upholding international justice and the rule of law, like the collective commitments to prevent and resolve conflicts and avoid humanitarian disasters, ring hollow at the altar of reality. When the chips are down, major Powers, and especially the United States, continue to pursue their perceived narrow interests at the expense of regional peace and security and the sovereign rights of nations and peoples.

Be this as it may, my Government is determined not to allow the legal process to be derailed through various subtle subterfuges. Let me recall that Eritrea's right of independence was compromised by the United Nations in the 1950s — during the period of African decolonization — to serve the interests of the United States. Half a century later, we shall not allow any encroachment of our territorial integrity.

In addition, as my Government underlined during the last meeting of the Boundary Commission, first, the award that is "final and binding" in accordance with the Algiers Peace Agreement should not be tampered with under any circumstances. In this connection, Ethiopia's acceptance of the decision must be ascertained publicly and unequivocally. Secondly, the details and modalities of demarcation must be worked out in an environment that is free from political interference, unlawful and compounding mechanisms, and loopholes susceptible to distortion.

Allow me now to briefly dwell on the dangerous developments that are unfolding in Somalia and the muddled interpretations, both deliberate and innocent, that have gained currency in recent months. We must recognize that the current crisis in Somalia derives from multifaceted and cumulative underlying causes that have been in place for the past 15 years. Collective or individual initiatives that will be taken to promote enduring peace and stability in Somalia must accordingly address the following parameters if they are to bear fruit.

First, the daunting problem in Somalia is essentially an internal political problem that must be resolved through negotiations among Somali political forces themselves. In this spirit, my Government welcomes the efforts of the Sudanese Government to facilitate talks among Somali political forces.

Secondly, the portrayal of recent developments in Somalia in terms of the global war on terrorism is factually untenable and politically imprudent. The overarching national cause of the Somali people should not be reduced to or lumped together with this singular concern.

Thirdly, any external military intervention will further polarize the political realities of Somalia and induce greater conflagration. Ethiopia's military intervention, under whatever guise or justification, is particularly dangerous both for reasons of historical animosity and because of the events of the past few years. It must be understood that there is no consensus within the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) on the modalities, timing and nature of deploying foreign forces, although the matter was comprehensively discussed at ministerial meetings for the purposes of contingency planning only. We find the African Union's recent call for deployment of an 8,000-strong peacekeeping force in the absence of a robust framework of peace unwise and fraught with unnecessary complications. Its practicality is also questionable in view of the financial and other challenges that the African Union Mission in the Sudan (AMIS) is grappling with in that country.

Fourthly, a recent call by some forces for a selective lifting of the United Nations embargo on arms is unbalanced, misguided and fraught with the potential for dangerous consequences. Indeed, a selective lifting can only imperil the political process of reconciliation in Somalia and a durable political settlement there. Accordingly, appropriate adjustments to the arms embargo in Somalia can be contemplated only when there is irreversible progress in the political arrangements giving rise to national institutions that have credible legitimacy and popular support.

Fifthly, the challenges for promoting lasting peace and stability in Somalia are formidable. They will be complicated if different actors work, or are seen to be working, at cross purposes. Closer coordination and consultation among all interested players must be cultivated and structured.

Finally, the current situation in Somalia is raising the spectre of territorial claims and disputes between Somalia and its neighbours. Territorial disputes and

claims can only be settled by strict adherence to the sanctity of colonial boundaries.

Let me conclude by urging caution and prudence in the international efforts to help resolve the problems in the Sudan. The truth is that the high price of hasty and ill-advised policies will ultimately be borne by the people of the Sudan and the region as a whole. The complexities of the situation must therefore be gauged carefully, and all international efforts must be harnessed to promote a robust peace package that will bring about a lasting solution. Focus on short-term arrangements without an overall peace framework will only postpone and complicate a lasting solution.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Elmar Maharram oglu Mammadyarov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Mr. Mammadyarov (Azerbaijan): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa on her election to the presidency of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly and wish her every success during her tenure.

I would like also to extend my sincere thanks to her predecessor, my good friend Mr. Jan Eliasson, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, for his efforts and active work with the delegations throughout the last session.

The 2005 High-level Plenary Meeting of the Assembly became an important milestone in the history of the United Nations. It reaffirmed our faith in the Organization and our unwavering interest to make it stronger and effective. I am pleased to emphasize the positive moves that we have made since last September on issues such as development, the environment, HIV/AIDS, Secretariat reform, establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund and the Peacebuilding Fund.

The founding of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council are remarkable moments in the history of the United Nations. Yet more remains to be done to realize our common vision of solidarity and collective security, which is premised on the shared values and principles of the Charter.

As we move towards such ambitious goals, it is increasingly apparent that multilateralism with a strong United Nations at its core remains the only reliable instrument for maintaining international peace and security, achieving sustainable development and promoting respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Strengthening the deliberative and decision-making authority of the General Assembly, which represents the views of all Member States, is key to the successful implementation and effectiveness of the reforms.

Azerbaijan believes that reform of the Security Council should not be confined to enlargement of its membership. We stand for the rationalization of the Council's working methods, greater transparency in decision-making, accountability in performance and full implementation of its resolutions.

The election of the new Secretary-General is an event of the utmost importance for the Organization. It has already been revealed to suffer from a number of deficiencies and requires greater transparency and inclusion of the wider membership. Azerbaijan believes that the new head of the United Nations should clearly recognize the trends and challenges faced by the international community at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Azerbaijan regrets that the late response of the Security Council to the evolving crisis in the Middle East allowed the humanitarian tragedy to unfold. In that regard, implementation of the measures contained in Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), including those related to the Lebanese Government's seven-point peace plan, is very important for bringing durable peace to the Middle East. Azerbaijan will continue its efforts to contribute to the peaceful resolution of the conflict and alleviate the sufferings of civilians in Lebanon.

I would like to express profound support for the States that have fallen victim to terrorist attacks. While strongly condemning terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and reaffirming our commitment to jointly fight that global scourge, we register our serious concern over attempts to link terrorism to the Islamic religion, culture or people.

There is a dire need to stop and reverse a growing tendency towards Islamophobia in the world. Azerbaijan, in its capacity as Chairman of the Ministerial Council of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) calls upon Member States to undertake concrete measures to enhance dialogue and

broaden understanding among nations, cultures and religions by promoting tolerance and respect for freedom of religion and belief. It is of vital importance to raise public awareness about the tenets and values of Islam worldwide, including in the Muslim societies. To that end, we plan to host in Baku in 2007, under the aegis of the OIC, an international conference on the role of the mass media in developing tolerance and mutual understanding.

The situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan has recently become a subject of urgent consideration by the General Assembly, due to the massive fires occurring in those territories. The Assembly adopted without a vote a resolution stressing the necessity to conduct an urgent environmental operation with a view to suppressing the fires, overcoming their detrimental impact and rehabilitating the affected territories. The resolution has a two-fold purpose. On the one hand, it envisages a number of practical steps, including an assessment of the short- and long-term impact of the fires on the environment as a step in preparation for the environmental operation, counteracting the environmental degradation of the region, and the rehabilitation of the fire-affected part of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. On the other, it serves as an unprecedented example of engaging the parties to the conflict, particularly Armenia and Azerbaijan, in a joint environmental operation to be carried out directly in the fire-affected zone. The implementation of the resolution will contribute to establishing an atmosphere of trust and confidence and will give positive impetus to the negotiation process.

Sadly, that is the only positive development so far and cannot be attributed to the overall situation concerning the settlement process. Although no substantial progress has been registered so far, the parties and mediators have accepted the stage-by-stage approach in the settlement process as the only possible option. Basically, there are two main issues on which the parties disagree — the definition of the status of self-rule for the population of the occupied Nagorny Karabakh region and the withdrawal of Armenian forces from all the occupied territories of Azerbaijan.

There is a common understanding that the status cannot be defined today. It should be elaborated through a peaceful, democratic and legal process with the direct participation and consent of both Azerbaijani and Armenian communities of the Nagorny Karabakh region. To that end, the Armenian occupying forces have to withdraw from the occupied territories and the necessary conditions have to be in place to allow the secure and dignified return of the indigenous Azerbaijani displaced persons to the Nagorny Karabakh region and the surrounding territories of Azerbaijan.

Such a logical chain of events will establish the necessary conditions for the next stage of the settlement, which is normalizing life in the conflict-affected area, restoring intercommunal relations, launching socio-economic development and considering appropriate models of self-rule for the entire population of the region within Azerbaijan.

Our position is based on relevant resolutions of the Security Council and decisions of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which unequivocally demand the unconditional withdrawal of the occupying forces from all occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the restoration of its sovereignty and territorial integrity, the creation of favourable conditions for the safe return of the civilian population, the restoration of intercommunal relations, and the elaboration of the status of self-government within a democratic and legal process, based on the agreement of both communities of the region.

It is difficult to hope for a breakthrough in the negotiations when Armenia rejects face-to-face meetings and refuses to take a constructive approach to solving existing problems. What is more worrisome is that Armenia is attempting to support by all available means the separatist regime established under its control in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and to spread myths and legends about the historical past and the alleged democratic and economic achievements of the regime. As a matter of fact, the reality on the ground proves the opposite. The Armenian community, which is the only remaining part of the entire population of the Nagorny Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, is increasingly inclined to leave the unrecognized quasi-entity due to worsening living conditions and the lack of any prospect of economic and social development.

The dynamics of development of the entire region are strikingly evident, and in five or 10 years the economic growth of the region vis-à-vis Armenia will be much more impressive. It could be given a chance to join ongoing regional and transnational projects, but

prior to that Yerevan has to take a number of steps to establish normal relations with its neighbours.

The first plenary meetings of the Assembly under the presidency of Sheikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa were marked by an extremely difficult debate over an issue that was procedural in nature, but had a substantial political bearing. I join my colleagues from the States members of the Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM) in commending her wisdom and efforts aimed at ensuring that the rules of this house serve the interests of all Member States. Procedural disadvantages should not constrain the Member States from bringing critical issues affecting their security to the attention of the Assembly.

The GUAM heads of State, in their Joint Declaration on the issue of conflict settlement, called upon States and international organizations to further facilitate, within their competence, conflict settlement processes in the GUAM area. Therefore, the inclusion of the new item on conflicts in the GUAM area in the agenda of the General Assembly is an attempt to raise the awareness of the Assembly of dangerous developments emerging from those unresolved conflicts.

The pledges we have made to promote better standards of living in larger freedom nourish the faith of people around the world in future positive change and development. Hence, there is no greater imperative than to fulfil the development agenda and to strengthen global partnership for development.

Azerbaijan is convinced that national development strategies should be a principal framework of development cooperation and support. Efficiency in the implementation process cannot be achieved unless it employs measures targeted at increasing the self-sufficiency of countries in the long run, inter alia, through knowledge, capacity-building, infrastructure development and market access and, ultimately, by reducing their dependence on foreign aid. A favourable global economic situation remains a prerequisite for the success of national development strategies, macroeconomic policies and, eventually, the economic and financial stability and growth of countries.

Azerbaijan believes that international organizations should support the efforts of countries to improve and sustain their economic performance. We look forward to the contribution of the United Nations with a stronger and more effective Economic and Social Council capable of effectively discharging its newly assigned functions.

Let me now describe the economic outlook for Azerbaijan and its experience in enhancing growth, development and social well-being. In the light of trends in 2005, gross domestic product is expected to increase by 30.5 per cent in 2006, driven by oil and gas production and exports. In 2006, State spending has been increased by up to 65 per cent, a large proportion being spent on the public sector and infrastructure. The key challenge facing the Government is to create a favourable environment for investment in the non-oil sector and to diversify exports. To achieve this objective, it must keep domestic reforms on track and strive to strengthen the business environment.

The year 2006 marked a historic moment for the region and beyond, with the official inauguration of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline. We are looking forward to completion of the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzerum natural gas pipeline this fall and remain committed to contributing to global energy security. At the same time, we are actively developing transregional infrastructure projects, in particular the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad, which has been recognized as an important addition to the East-West and North-South transportation corridors.

Last but not least, the establishment of the Human Rights Council marked a critical step towards enhancing the universal system for promoting and protecting human rights worldwide. The Council has been endowed with the necessary mandate to give human rights the central role foreseen by the Charter, and its status is that of a subsidiary body of the General Assembly. We have to build effective mechanisms, such as universal periodic review, special procedures and a complaints procedure within the Council. As a newly elected member of the Human Rights Council, Azerbaijan reiterates its readiness to cooperate with other Member States in order to ensure that the new Council becomes an effective body guided by the principles of universality, objectivity and non-selectivity and that it bases its activity on constructive and transparent dialogue and cooperation.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Abdurrahman Mohamed Shalghem, Secretary of the General People's

Committee for Foreign Liaison and International Cooperation of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

Mr. Shalghem (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation has already congratulated the President on her assumption of her high office. I would like to reaffirm our confidence in her ability to accomplish her task and to lead our deliberations to a successful conclusion. I also wish to express our gratitude to her predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, Foreign Minister of Sweden, for his conduct of the work of the General Assembly during the previous session. Lastly, we are indebted to the Secretary-General for his efforts to advance the process of reform at the United Nations and fulfilment of the purposes and principles of its Charter.

Last year our efforts were focused on reform. Some progress has now been made, and we have established the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission. However, there is still a long way to go, since any reform that does not include the Security Council and enhance the role of the General Assembly will be of little value and will not meet the expectations of our peoples.

Unfortunately, our quest for reform of the Security Council has met with further encroachment by the Council on the functions and powers with which the General Assembly was endowed by the Charter. It is therefore incumbent on the Assembly to take immediate action to prevent the Council from infringing further on its authority.

We also take this opportunity to call on the permanent members of the Security Council not to hamper the reform efforts but rather to promote a genuine reform of the Organization. Such reform should place the power of decision-making in the hands of all members of the Assembly, a forum in which all States are entitled to vote. The Security Council will then become an executive tool for implementing the decisions of the Assembly. We can thus remedy the current situation in which the Council has become a domineering and inequitable body, applying double standards, lacking democracy and open to abuse of the veto.

History bears witness to the fact that the Council has never achieved peace and security in the world. On the contrary, it has served as a tool for aggression and wars and for the curtailment of peace mechanisms. Consequently, it is the General Assembly, in which all the peoples of the world are represented, that should take decisions on peace and war, and the power to apply Chapter VII of the Charter should be vested solely in the Assembly. The Security Council, with its limited membership, cannot be entrusted with such momentous decisions.

If we fail to agree on such a change, we must find a new formula for granting permanent membership of the Council. Permanent membership should be conferred on geographical groups rather than specific countries. We therefore demand that the African Union become a permanent member of the Security Council, as Africa is the only continent without a permanent seat on the Council.

More than three decades ago, Libya called for abolition of the veto. It submitted draft resolutions on this subject at the thirty-fourth session of the General Assembly and the six following sessions. Libya holds that this prerogative of the permanent members is the greatest of the obstacles preventing the Council from fulfilling its mandate. It therefore renews its call for abolition of the veto and urges the Assembly to take steps to restrict use of the veto until it is finally abolished. Within the framework of the current consultations on reform of the Council, we would like to reaffirm Libya's adherence to the common African position issued by the Fifth African Union Summit, held in Sirte, Libya, on 4 and 5 July 2005, and later confirmed by the Extraordinary Summit of the African Union, held in Addis Ababa on 4 August 2005.

Maintenance of international peace and security is a noble goal of the United Nations. Undoubtedly, general and complete disarmament, starting with weapons of mass destruction, constitutes the essential component for achievement of this goal, which, however, will remain beyond reach unless all Member States cooperate in good faith and in a fully transparent manner. Libya has voluntarily abandoned all its programmes related to weapons of mass destruction and has expressed the hope that all States in possession of weapons of mass destruction or programmes for such weapons will follow its example.

It is important not to confuse weapons of mass destruction and nuclear non-proliferation with programmes for the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Under international law, all States have the right to conduct research and develop their scientific capabilities for the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Libya strongly rejects the use of double standards when dealing with this issue and the practice of discrimination between States with respect to nuclear non-proliferation.

The establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission is an important step in promoting peace in countries emerging from conflict. We hope to see soon the achievements of this new body in Africa, where the African Union has been able, with the assistance of the international community, to achieve peace in several African countries. African peoples look forward to the assistance of the United Nations in the consolidation of peace in order to implement development programmes and combat poverty, disease and illiteracy.

Terrorism is a phenomenon that threatens international peace and security. Such a threat cannot be countered by the action of a single State or group of States. Furthermore, it is a problem that cannot be resolved through attribution to a particular religion or nationality. It is also shameful and unacceptable to describe the legitimate struggle of a people against foreign occupation as an act of terrorism.

Libya was among the first States that called for coordination of international efforts against international terrorism. Fifteen years ago it called for a special session of the General Assembly to study this phenomenon and develop measures to combat it and eradicate its root causes. It is high time to respond to that call so that we can coordinate our efforts, under the auspices of the United Nations, to study this phenomenon and reach a clear definition of terrorism that distinguishes between terrorism and the legitimate struggle of peoples for self-determination and independence.

The change of the Human Rights Commission into the Human Rights Council reflects the great attention the international community gives to enforcing human rights and guaranteeing basic freedoms. We hope that the inception of this Council's work will constitute a beginning towards addressing the issues impartially and non-discriminately, free from selectivity and double standards. We hope that human rights issues will not be used as a means of pressure against small nations. We emphasize that attempts by some States to use protection of human rights as a pretext to interfere in the internal affairs of other States will only lead to the destabilization of peace and security, causing more problems rather than solving outstanding ones.

Sustainable development is a major challenge facing developing countries. It is incumbent upon the United Nations to establish an international partnership for development that aims to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, based on the activation of dialogue between North and South. All this should be done within the framework of respect for sovereignty, equality and the sharing of benefits, guaranteeing the achievement of the agreed goal of a 0.7 per cent allocation of the gross national product of developed countries as development assistance to developing countries. Furthermore, such a partnership should guarantee the appropriate application of all principles of free multilateral trade and the enforcement of all measures related to special and preferential treatment for developing countries, within the framework of World Trade Organization, including facilitating the accession of developing countries to that organization.

Countries with a colonial past bear the greatest responsibility for assisting developing countries as compensation for the damage caused them during the colonial period. The big Powers that waged wars on the territories of developing countries must bear responsibility for demining and removal of explosive remnants left in those countries. They should begin immediately to provide maps and the necessary technical equipment for the rehabilitation of the affected lands in some of the developing countries.

The massacres and repression that are committed by Israeli occupation forces in occupied Palestine against the Palestinian people and the flagrant violations of human rights confirm that the so-called peace process is but a mirage that will not yield any results, particularly given the inability of the Security Council to take any action to protect the Palestinian people and to compel the occupation force to respect its commitments and stop its aggression and crimes against the Palestinian people. Libya therefore reiterates its emphasis that any proposed solutions that seek to impose a fait accompli will not resolve the Palestinian question, nor will they provide peace for the area. The only solution that can achieve peace is to guarantee the return of all Palestinian refugees to their homes and to establish a democratic State on the land of historical Palestine, in which Arabs and Jews live on equal footing, similar to South Africa, where blacks and whites manage to coexist after decades of conflict

and bloodshed. Unless that is achieved, the region will continue to live in a state of conflict, in which no one will enjoy any peace or security.

The recent Israeli aggression against Lebanon and its targeting of the infrastructure and civilians there emphasize the need for urgent action to compel the occupation forces to withdraw from the Sheba'a farms and return them to Lebanon. Additionally, urgent action is needed regarding the withdrawal from and return to Syria of the occupied Syrian Golan. The Israelis should be forced to pay reparations for the damage they caused in Lebanon due to their brutal aggression.

The situation in brotherly Iraq is a cause of sadness and concern. It is, in fact, a catastrophe brought about by an occupation that has left behind tens of thousands of dead and hundreds of thousands of wounded and handicapped persons. No matter how optimistic we may be, this catastrophic situation will not end as long as there are occupation forces in the country, forces that feed divisions inside Iraqi society and encourage sectarianism in Government institutions. We believe it is high time to stop the bloodshed in Iraq and find a solution to end the crisis so that all Iraqis may enjoy peace and security, as well as their basic rights, in a unified and democratic Iraq enjoying full sovereignty and free from foreign forces and bases.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Lamin Kaba Bajo, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Gambia.

Mr. Bajo (Gambia): My delegation extends our heartiest congratulations to Ms. Al-Khalifa on her election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. Her election signifies a most welcome rebalancing of the General Assembly towards greater gender parity and will certainly bring a breath of fresh air to our deliberations. We hope also that it will help our Organization address those issues of war, conflict, oppression, deprivation and terrorism that dog today's world with the kind of compassion and sensitivity known only to mothers. I would like to assure her of my delegation's fullest cooperation and support at all times.

The outgoing President, Mr. Jan Eliasson, applied all his wisdom and vast diplomatic experience in presiding over a session fraught with difficult and exceedingly complex organizational reform issues. We thank him for guiding us deep into the process and wish him well in his new assignment.

We should not delude ourselves into thinking that reforming the United Nations is a task that can be achieved quickly. The issues are contentious and multifaceted, and only deep reflection and determined negotiation over time will see us through. For this reason, we should not feel disheartened that one year after the World Summit we have still not concluded the process. We should congratulate ourselves on having achieved a breakthrough with the establishment of the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission. Management reform is problematic, but the desire to achieve it in a fair and balanced manner will remain a key demand of developing countries. A selective approach to reforming the Organization will work in no one's interest. Some reforms are long overdue and sorely needed.

For us in Africa, Security Council reform is urgent and must be concluded as soon as possible. Recent events have demonstrated that the old dispensation is ill equipped to grapple with the complexities of the world we live in today. Reform, I repeat, is urgent if today's Security Council is to be seen as poised to take on the new global peace and security challenges facing mankind.

We are gathered together at a time of great uncertainty and, for many, despair because of our collective inability and lack of will to abide by the guiding principles of our founding fathers. We have not been too successful in preventing the scourge of war or in addressing the factors that give rise to war.

Rather than abating, the situation in the Middle East continues to fester and, in fact, deteriorate, as the Road Map leading to a two-State solution to the Palestinian-Israeli problem eludes us further. My delegation has repeatedly decried the lack of will on the part of the protagonists to work towards a speedy solution to this problem, which continues to spawn many other conflicts in other regions of the world.

It is a matter of deep regret that this world body watched almost helplessly as a Member State — Lebanon — was attacked and made to suffer extensive destruction to infrastructure, property and human life. Although we have been able to bring about a cessation of hostilities, we cannot claim to have achieved peace. All the conditions for a resumption of the conflict remain intact. We must address those conditions more

resolutely. We must also do everything within our power to ensure that the problem between Hizbollah and Israel does not pull in other countries of the region and lead to full scale war between them and Israel. The consequences would be disastrous for us all.

My delegation condemns in the strongest terms Israel's continued illegal occupation of Palestinian territory and Arab lands, its intensive military campaign in the West Bank and Gaza, which has resulted in untold civilian casualties and extensive destruction of infrastructure, and its arrest and detention of thousands of Palestinian civilians and their leaders. The Hamas Government in Palestine was elected democratically by the Palestinian people, who, by the tenets of democracy which we all claim to espouse, are the only ones who may freely choose their leaders. Or are we to understand that this basic tenet of democracy should apply only if the leaders chosen are to our liking and meet with our approval? I urge all peace-loving and democratic members of the international community to assist the Hamas Government to play its role as a representative of its people in a responsible, democratic and dignified manner.

In Iraq, the unresolved conflict has now become uncontrollable and has all but degenerated into civil war. We must look for imaginative ways of stabilizing that situation and bringing the widespread killings, destruction and suffering to an end.

We must show leadership. Double standards have affected the effectiveness of our response to the peace and security needs of the Middle East for far too long and have only muddied the waters further. The people of the region must now enjoy some respite and be given the space to pursue their development in an atmosphere of peace, tranquillity and security. It is becoming increasingly clear that the only remaining honest broker that can ensure that this happens is the United Nations. We must step up to the plate.

Violence in Afghanistan appears to be re-escalating. The United Nations must join hands with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and other partners to engage all concerned in dialogue, with a view to addressing the factors that are driving the hostilities to which the long-suffering people of this great country are subjected.

While we must obviously intervene to contain and arrest raging conflicts, we must not be oblivious to the need to pay equal attention to nascent conflict situations. One such situation is that which is prevailing across the Taiwan Strait, where the People's Republic of China has openly threatened Taiwan with military intervention, should it as much as express an intention to declare itself independent. In addition, the People's Republic of China has increased its arsenal of missiles trained on Taiwan to over 800 warheads. It goes without saying that a deterioration of the situation into all-out war will only provoke an unwelcome mix of responses from allies within and without the region, responses that could cause a conflagration that would make the Middle East situation pale in comparison.

In Africa, the good news is that peace continues to spread. From Sierra Leone and Liberia to Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we are witnessing a growing preference for non-violent approaches to conflict resolution. We should persist so that this trend continues and embraces countries such as Somalia and the Sudan, with its Darfur imbroglio.

In Somalia, the central Government should be assisted to stand firmly on its own two feet and exercise control over the entire Somali territory. The international community must take every precaution to prevent Somalia from becoming a haven for terrorists and other extremists.

In the case of the Sudan, my delegation appeals to the brotherly people of that great country to intensify dialogue with the international community in its quest for a resolution of the Darfur crisis. In reaching a final decision on whether or not the African Union Mission in the Sudan (AMIS) should pass the baton to a United Nations peacekeeping force, we are certain that, with a bit more effort on all sides, a way will be found out of the present impasse.

While we must all work in concert to fight terrorism, we must also endeavour not to lose respect for fundamental human rights and civil liberties in the process. In addition, we must increase our cooperation in this fight and strengthen political and diplomatic interventions in order to win it. No matter how many resources or how much firepower are committed to combating the phenomenon, without international cooperation of this type, our efforts will come to naught. Recent developments in countries like Iraq have shown that to be the case.

Last year, we all rededicated ourselves to the full implementation of the Millennium Declaration. There

are ample indications today that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are not likely to be met in most of sub-Saharan Africa if present trends continue. It is clear that we must all do more to identify and help remove the bottlenecks that are inhibiting progress towards them. We must address the serious capacity constraints that circumscribe the development efforts of many an African country. We must help stimulate economic growth through enabling policy measures that empower our countries for greater and more meaningful participation in world trade. We must make real progress in the Doha round. We must increase foreign direct investment in the African economy. We must honour our commitment to increasing official development assistance to 0.7 per cent of gross national income. We must, in partnership, attack the great health scourges of our time, namely, HIV/AIDS and malaria.

In the Gambia, United Nations and other independent assessments indicate that, on many fronts, we are making steady progress. We are committed to achieving the MDGs, in addition to the goals of the International Conference on Population and Development.

We have reversed the spread of HIV/AIDS. We have already achieved gender parity in education and, by extension, registered significant progress in gender equality, equity and the empowerment of women. We have brought potable water and good sanitation to over 70 per cent of our people. We have reduced the prevalence of malaria and the incidence of maternal and under-five mortality. We have attained 100 per cent child immunization coverage. We have significantly increased access to education at all levels and shall meet the basic education goal, God willing, next year or the year after. Our sharpest focus is on poverty reduction, and we are determined to attain that goal before 2015.

We have been able to achieve these gains, in spite of the severe resource constraints that we face, because of determined and committed leadership and our strong resolve to live up to our commitments to the international community.

According to the expert assessments of the United Nations agencies, the Gambia is among the very few African countries that will achieve the MDGs on target, if present trends continue. Our achievements in relation to the development agenda have been made possible only through strong and genuine partnerships, which we hope will continue and will grow to meet the task ahead.

The trade policy of our Government continues to be guided by the principles of liberalization, deregulation and investment promotion. We have brought about a progressive reduction of tariffs and continued improvements in infrastructure to increase our competitiveness as a production and trade gateway into West Africa.

We regard the private sector as an important engine of growth. Therefore, to further enhance its development, our Government has formulated policies for the systematic strengthening of the small and medium-sized enterprise sector of our economy. It is our hope that implementation of these policies will lead to the creation of conditions conducive to the speedy attraction of high levels of foreign direct investment which will, in turn, stimulate the growth of employment and incomes and lead to significant reductions in the incidence of poverty among the Gambian people.

We are conscious of the need for all our development partners to speak to us with one voice so as to increase coherence in the partnership. To this end, we have this year encouraged our major multilateral partners — the World Bank, the African Development Bank Group, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations Development Programme and its Millennium Project — to work together with us in crafting a coherent Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper which will form the basis for a coordinated framework of partnership in development.

The President returned to the Chair.

There are many commendable programmes and initiatives designed to assist countries like the Gambia. The Group of Eight initiatives for Africa, the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the Blair Commission for Africa, the Millennium Challenge Account and the Third Tokyo International Conference on African Development, inter alia, will have an impact only if they do not raise the bar unrealistically high, such that the countries they are meant to assist are unable to meet the stringent criteria for gaining access to the funds. If aid is to be meaningful, it must be accessible, predictable and not fragmented. Moreover, a well-designed aid architecture that

involves recipients in critical aspects of decision-making is part of the answer for achieving the much-sought effectiveness of official development assistance, a subject of concern in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

Yet, while those programmes and initiatives may encourage many least developed countries in their hopes for early relief, in reality, the accompanying enablers have not been forthcoming. The Doha Round is in limbo, our modest economic growth is being threatened by unpredictably high energy prices, and debt relief is still on the distant horizon. For many of us, it is one step forward before world economic trends take us two steps back. Of even greater concern is the fact that this plethora of initiatives has hardly made a dent in the poverty situation in our countries. The blueprints are manifold, the responses too few. Unfulfilled promises only dash our hopes, leave us frustrated and diminish our faith in the effectiveness of international partnerships for development.

We in the Gambia continue to deepen our democracy. Just four days ago, the Gambian electorate went to the polls to once again choose their leader in a free and fair manner. Let me take this opportunity to convey the thanks and appreciation of His Excellency Al Hadji Yahya A. J. J. Jammeh to the many delegations that have expressed to him their congratulations and best wishes on his resounding victory at the elections. The President considers that victory to be a mandate from the Gambian electorate to continue his service to the Gambian people and, indeed, to the international community at large. Our electoral process has been acclaimed throughout the world for its openness, fairness and transparency.

The subject of the High-level Dialogue held just a few days ago was international migration and development. For the very first time, we had the courage to address that issue within the walls of the United Nations — and rightly so, for international migration has been at the core of human history. It has driven the spread of human knowledge and civilization. It has enriched cultures and societies and caused mankind to make great leaps in science, technology, engineering and overall social and economic development. We are all migrants. Therefore, let us approach the issue of international migration with humanity, tolerance, respect and compassion.

Attempts to penalize or criminalize international migration will not work. In our globalized village, international migration is an undeniable, positive and indispensable force for keeping the wheels of national economies and human society in motion. We must look to the positive side of this natural human activity and desist from actions that trample on the dignity of migrants, as well as from acts of racism, xenophobia and abuse of human rights.

As the saying goes, injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. For decades, extensive illegal and extraterritorial measures have been pursued against Cuba, a small, friendly and democratic nation. They have not worked and will never work. My delegation joins the vast majority of the members of the international community in calling for the lifting of the decades-long embargo against Cuba in order to enable the hard-working people of that great country to pursue their development aspirations in an atmosphere of peace. Let us all strive to live and let live.

By the same token, we must also urgently address the question of Taiwan. The legitimate quest of the people of Taiwan for a voice and standing in the United Nations must be ignored no longer. Taiwan is an important actor in our global economy and contributes immensely to global peace and security. It must be formally granted recognition as a responsible member of the international community. A simple way to grant that recognition would be to give Taiwan its rightful place in the United Nations.

In that connection, the Government of the Gambia wishes to strongly protests the General Committee's violation of the rules of procedure on 12 September this year by amalgamating two items proposed by its members into one agenda item, thus preventing members from participating in the discussion of those items. We will therefore require a legal opinion from the United Nations on an expedited basis to ensure that we are provided with the opportunity to engage in a debate on that issue, as we are duly entitled to do.

Before I conclude, let me salute, commend and bid farewell to one of Africa's outstanding personalities, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, since this will be the last General Assembly session during his tenure as Secretary-General. President Al Hadji Yahya Jammeh had the honour to pay tribute to him during the Summit of Heads of State and Government

of the African Union held in Banjul in July. Therefore, I should like to say only that the Government and the people of the Gambia salute his leadership, his astute diplomatic skills, his demonstrated commitment to international peace, security and development, and his unswerving faith in the international system. Mr. Annan's term as Secretary-General may be ending, but I am sure that he will continue to be there for us and will willingly come to the rescue when we need his wisdom and vast experience in mediating complex global problems. We wish him well in his future endeavours, and we wish him and his family continued good health and happiness in their new life.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Antonio Isaac Monteiro, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Guinea-Bissau.

Mr. Monteiro (Guinea-Bissau) (*spoke in Portuguese; interpretation from French text provided by the delegation*): The sixty-first session of the General Assembly has begun its work in quite a disturbing context. We note the persistence of certain conflicts and the emergence of new hot spots of tension, which are serious threats to international peace and stability. World poverty and hunger have not decreased, despite the enormous efforts of our countries to improve the living conditions of our populations. In fact, we note a deterioration in the social and health conditions of millions of people as a result of endemic diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, particularly on the African continent.

The political, economic, financial, social and environmental problems facing the world are assuming increasingly alarming proportions. That requires concerted efforts on the part of the entire international community. Therefore, we must work together to strengthen the existing multilateral system and the capacity of the United Nations to act in order to address those challenges more effectively.

Our people expect concrete, swift and effective measures from the Organization, involving the establishment of modern and efficient operational structures. In short, reforms within the United Nations system are necessary and urgent.

It is in that context that, on behalf of my country, Guinea-Bissau, which it is my honour to represent, I warmly congratulate you, Madam, on your election as President of the General Assembly at the present session. We believe that your many qualities and your long experience are guarantees of the success of our work. Under your guidance, we will experience a new dynamism capable of promoting joint efforts for peace. I would like to assure you of the availability and full cooperation of our delegation in contributing to the achievement of the our common goals.

Allow me to congratulate your predecessor as well, Mr. Jan Eliasson, for his dedication to the cause of our Organization and for the important results achieved during the sixtieth session. I reference in particular to the creation of the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission, of which my country is a member.

We recently participated in the fourteenth Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Havana, where a large number of world leaders gathered. Those eminent personalities, including the head of State of Guinea-Bissau, considered the world's problems, the seriousness of which calls to us all and demands of us concerted and collective actions. The conclusions reached at the Summit, as well as the initiatives we intend to undertake on behalf of our Movement, are in line, to a large extent, with the opinions, recommendations and solutions set out by the Secretary-General in his annual report on the work of the Organization, delivered during a brilliant speech to the Assembly.

None today can doubt the seriousness of the situation in the Middle East, particularly in Lebanon. It is the same with regard to the tragic conditions in which millions of our African brothers live in Darfur. It is clear that we can no longer accept the systematic violation of international norms. Nor can we understand why we are incapable of taking concerted, negotiated and responsible measures to put an end to a tragic situation that threatens the lives of innocent and vulnerable people. Our brothers in Darfur have the right to the compassion and solidarity of Africa in particular, and of the international community as a whole.

If current trends in the world continue, poor countries will not be able to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. The reforms that are planned or that have already been introduced into our systems of governance, respect for the rules of democracy and respect for human rights are,

unfortunately, insufficient to achieve the rates of growth essential to relaunch our economies.

In our countries, the economic and financial situation depends on internal and external factors that we do not control. Protectionist measures and subsidies for agricultural products such as cotton, sugar and wheat seriously compromise the competitive capacity of our farmers. The absence of an agreement on the rules that should govern international trade and the lack of political will and of progress in the negotiations within the World Trade Organization are aggravating factors.

We need to recognize that we are far from achieving the objectives set out in the Monterrey Consensus and Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, which concern developing countries, particularly the least developed countries. We also feel the imbalance in the globalization process. These are serious obstacles to our development. The midterm review for the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010 has indeed shed new light on the shortcomings and on the still-insufficient level of development assistance. In this environment, our efforts to eliminate poverty and create better living conditions within our countries are at risk.

A large part of our populations, particularly our young people, are more and more despondent because of the very high level of unemployment and lack of hope for a better future. Thousands of young people are so desperate that they even risk their lives to seek other forms of existence, which, unfortunately, often turn out to be mirages. The international community must accord greater attention to this issue so that we might find the means to ensure the rebirth of hope in the hearts of our youth. I am thinking especially of creating professional training centres and promoting activities that generate jobs, thus ensuring more and better social integration.

I would also like to stress in this regard the importance of the High-level Meeting on International Migration and Development, which for the first time met here at the Headquarters of the United Nations. I am convinced that thanks to this type of dialogue and cooperation at the international level, we will be better equipped to put a brake on illegal immigration and on organized crime, to which this tragic phenomenon is more and more linked.

Guinea-Bissau, with a considerable number of citizens living abroad, pays particular attention to the issue of migration. Therefore we welcome the place it occupies on the agenda of the international community. We support the relevant recommendations emerging from the High-level Dialogue on Migration and Development that took place here in New York, two weeks ago. We are aware of the role played by our diaspora in the economy of developing countries, thanks to remittances and other forms of contributions. My country is committed to developing an appropriate national policy on this issue in cooperation with our development partners, especially with the countries of destination.

On 17 July Guinea-Bissau hosted the sixteenth Conference of the Heads of State Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP). The heads of State of our community reaffirmed their determination to step up efforts to eradicate hunger and poverty. They also committed themselves to undertaking concrete measures to mobilize internal and external resources for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. The consolidation of democracy, the rule of law and human rights issues were also subjects of particular attention for these leaders. They are indispensable preconditions for international peace and security. The heads of State also decided to strengthen relations between the CPLP and the United Nations and its specialized agencies in order to establish an effective partnership.

Allow me in this respect to thank, on behalf of the CPLP, all our partners for the important assistance they have given to the weakest members of our community. I would also like to appeal to our development partners in general and to the Group of Eight countries in particular, requesting that they assist us in addressing the critical issue of external debt burden.

One year after elections in Guinea-Bissau, which confirmed the return to constitutional normality in my country, I should like to reiterate here the commitment of the people, Government and especially that of Mr. João Bernardo Vieira, President of Guinea-Bissau, to spare no effort in consolidating peace and establishing political stability and national reconciliation. Significant progress has been made in this area. It must, however, be stressed that the complexity of the current reforms, especially within the defence and security forces, requires lasting and

substantial support from the international community, given the lack of resources available to us.

I would like to express our appreciation to all our partners, especially our brothers in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP), for their support and the creation of the International Contact Group on Guinea-Bissau, whose first meeting was held here at the United Nations Headquarters last week. I would also like to take this opportunity to reaffirm that my country will spare no effort to continue to deserve your confidence and solidarity. Nonetheless, it must be stressed that, despite our willingness and determination, Guinea-Bissau needs your urgent assistance in order to implement the measures contained in the national poverty reduction strategy paper. Just adopted by our Government, that document will serve as the basis for preparing a roundtable on Guinea-Bissau planned for next November at Geneva. It is a pleasure to invite all our traditional partners and others here present to take part in that roundtable, which will, indeed, be an event of great importance for stimulating our economy and for raising the living conditions of our people.

Today's world is a genuine global village. Mankind's progress in science, information technology, communications and transportation means that the destinies of our peoples are more and more interdependent. That is why we must combine our efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger in the world and to deal with endemic diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, and to put an end to injustices, violations of human rights and all forms of discrimination and intolerance.

When we discuss the issues of development and combating poverty, we must resist the temptation of taking the easy way and applying simplistic solutions. Economic and social development and its corollary, the eradication of poverty, require deep thought and courageous measures. No phenomenon can be explained simplistically, and there is no simple universal recipe. The signs of the times must be correctly interpreted. Peoples' opinions, their culture, their religious practices and their concerns must all be understood and respected. We must find new ways of reorganizing and strengthening democratic States by giving priority to education and training. We must also think about the need to increase our collective capacity to combat terrorism and to deal with all forms of extremism through permanent dialogue between cultures and civilizations.

It is incomprehensible, and even less acceptable, that human beings are abandoned and condemned to die under the indifferent regard of the international community. International solidarity towards vulnerable populations must not be delayed or be given under post mortem conditions. The international community must demonstrate vigilance and be capable of preventing all humanitarian catastrophes resulting from conflicts, as the Secretary-General rightly recalled, in the name of a universal conscience. It is precisely because of the universal nature of the responsibility of our Organization that Guinea-Bissau will spare no effort in order to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations through concerted, pragmatic and efficient reforms. In fact, the effectiveness of our Organization would be even greater with the full participation of all Member States with a view to enhancing our multilateral institution, which needs greater democracy and transparency in fulfilling its mandate.

More than sixty years after its founding, the United Nations must adapt to the changes that have taken place in the world in order to take into account the existence and the emergence of new players on the world stage whose contribution to peacekeeping and international security are becoming more and more important. Among those States are countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, which can legitimately lay claim to a permanent seat on the Security Council. Developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America have the right to greater participation and prominence on the Security Council.

Ten years ago, we elected Kofi Annan, an outstanding son of Africa, to guide the destiny of our Organization. As we assess his tenure, it is with pride and satisfaction that we note the achievements during his term of office. Recent years have not been easy, because the world is confronting new and longstanding challenges in various forms and scales and for which our Organization was insufficiently designed and prepared. On behalf of Guinea-Bissau, the President of Guinea-Bissau, João Bernardo Vieira, and our Government, I would like to add our voice to the vibrant tribute paid by the entire international community to the Secretary-General. I would also like to express the gratitude of our people to him for the contribution of the United Nations system in promoting

peace, political stability and development in our country.

The great challenges of the new millennium will determine the development work facing us and the capacity of people to resolve, as quickly as possible, problems of peace, political stability, national reconciliation and social justice. All States and civil society must be able to count upon, whenever required, the transparent and democratic functioning of the United Nations system for the defence of their rights, in a perspective that creates consensus and which is compatible with human development, namely compatible with the well-being of humanity.

As the General Assembly prepares to select a successor to Mr. Kofi Annan, it will, I am convinced, be able to elect a Secretary-General with the essential attributes of skill, experience and dedication for promoting better understanding between peoples and nations of this world.

The determination and leadership of the next Secretary-General will also be necessary in order to establish synergy and international cooperation so as to transform the United Nations into a unique and irreplaceable instrument that can strengthen multilateralism in favour of development, of improved conservation of our planet and of international peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Le Cong Phung, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam.

Mr. Le Cong Phung (Viet Nam): Madam President, at the outset, on behalf of the Vietnamese delegation, may I extend our warmest congratulations to you, the third woman in United Nations history to be elected as President of the General Assembly. I am confident that, under your wise leadership, this sixty-first session will be crowned with success. I also wish to convey our deep appreciation for the tremendous efforts undertaken and active contributions made by His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson during his presidency of the General Assembly at its sixtieth session.

As His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan's last term of duty as Secretary-General of the United Nations comes to a close, I wish, on behalf of the Vietnamese Government, to express our deep appreciation for his dedication and commitment to our Organization. His visit to Viet Nam last May was another milestone in the history of the ever-growing Viet Nam-United Nations cooperative relationship.

The 2005 World Summit lit up our hopes for the achievement by the international community of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set out by our leaders at the Millennium Summit in 2000. One year has elapsed, and, regrettably, the picture of the world we see today is made up of paradoxes. Although the trend of peace, cooperation and development continues to prevail, so do the unilateral use of force, escalation of regional and ethnic conflicts and international terrorism. We have also seen serious hardships faced by developing countries under the pressure of globalization, and inequality in international economic relations. Poverty, epidemics, drugs and transnational crime pose even greater threats to hundreds of millions of people around the world.

Against this backdrop, in the view of the Vietnamese delegation, continued joint efforts to create a favourable environment for the achievement of the MDGs are even more imperative. We consider the theme chosen for this sixty-first session of the General Assembly, focusing on global partnership for development, to be highly relevant.

Peace and socio-political stability are indispensable to development. In turn, positive economic development and improved living standards of people help to consolidate peace and stability in every country and region and the world as a whole. It is essential that nations work together to settle differences and disputes through dialogue, abandon the use of force in their relations and fully comply with the United Nations Charter and international law in order to build a peaceful and stable environment in the interest of all.

I wish to reaffirm Viet Nam's strong support for efforts to reach early peaceful settlements of international and regional conflicts and differences, including the nuclear issues on the Korean Peninsula and in Iran, and the crisis in the Middle East, where the recent hostilities in Lebanon, which caused heavy loss of innocent life and destruction of the country's infrastructure, serve as a typical example of harm brought about by unilateral actions.

In this connection, I wish to state Viet Nam's consistent policy of supporting the just struggle of the Palestinian people for their inalienable rights. I call on all parties concerned to implement the United Nations

Security Council resolutions on the Middle East, including resolution 1701 (2006), and soon arrive at a fair and lasting solution for peace and stability in the region.

Viet Nam is deeply concerned by the upsurge of terrorism in the world. We will continue to support the joint efforts of the international community to combat terrorism on the basis of the fundamental principles of the United Nations Charter and international law, as well as respect for national sovereignty. The deep roots of terrorism, including poverty, inequality and injustice, must be eliminated. What should also be mentioned here is the unfortunate reality that, in many cases, the suppression of terrorist organizations, including those targeting Viet Nam, is being undertaken selectively, with double standards. It is our view that such conduct may leave room for more international terrorist acts.

Achievements in science and technology, especially information technology, and globalization have brought about great opportunities for all countries. They have also brought about the dark side of international economic relations. A widened development gap between the rich and the poor poses potential threats to world peace and security. In the Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit, our leaders called for the establishment of a global partnership for development to enhance cooperation in all financial, trade and investment areas and called for increased assistance to developing countries, considering that such steps by the international community would contribute to establishing a favourable environment for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Such global partnership is yet to be seen, and we are concerned with increasing adverse impacts of globalization. The failure of the Doha Round, the strengthening of protectionism in a number of developed countries and fluctuating oil and gold prices are causing more and more difficulties for developing nations in their efforts to achieve the MDGs. A typical example of this situation is the anti-dumping tariff imposed on Vietnamese catfish and shrimp in past years and on footwear at present; this measure is affecting the lives of millions of poor people. It runs counter to World Trade Organization (WTO) rules and the spirit of trade liberalization pursued by Member States. It should also be pointed out that the increased integration of developing nations in the world economy is indeed an important element in ensuring the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Developing countries should be supported and assisted to join the World Trade Organization (WTO) as early as possible. Non-tariff barriers under the guise of hygiene and safety standards, among others, should be removed to facilitate developing countries to access the markets of the developed economies. We have on many occasions expressed our view that, in our times, embargo and sanctions are completely obsolete policies. We once again call for an early lifting of the unilateral economic and trade embargo against Cuba.

Viet Nam welcomes the fact that a number of countries have set up road maps to allocate 0.7 per cent of their gross national product to official development assistance without any conditions. Technology transfer, capacity-building and human resource development should be further promoted. We welcome initiatives to settle the debts of poor countries, the solutions outlined in the Monterrey Consensus and the recent efforts of the international community towards this end. The United Nations should work out, especially at the national level, measures to further incorporate the MDGs in the implementation of global commitments undertaken during the past decade in the areas of women, children, population, development, HIV/AIDS prevention, housing, environment and social development.

Viet Nam supports efforts to strengthen multilateral mechanisms in which the United Nations plays a central role with a view to building and ensuring a peaceful and stable environment in the world. The United Nations should be reformed to improve its effectiveness, democratization and modes of operation on the basis of the fundamental principles enshrined in its Charter.

While welcoming initial successes in the United Nations reform process, such as the establishment of the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission, we realize that much remains to be done. Measures are needed to consolidate the central role and power of the General Assembly. The Security Council should also be reformed in both its composition and methods of work to ensure that it really represents the concerns and interests of all United Nations Members as stipulated in the Charter.

Viet Nam has made remarkable progress in implementing the MDGs and we are in a good position to meet the 2015 deadline. Based on our own experience, we believe that each country should, first and foremost, strive to create and maintain a peaceful environment for development, mobilize broad participation by people of all walks of life in poverty reduction efforts and reserve preferential treatments for the poor, vulnerable groups and people living in remote and difficult areas, with a view to helping them catch up with the majority. Furthermore, effective prevention of natural disasters and mitigation of their consequences are crucial factors.

To create a peaceful environment for national development, Viet Nam will continue with its foreign policy of sovereign independence, peace, cooperation and development. We continue to be a friend and reliable partner of all countries in the international community striving for peace and cooperation and we will continue to actively participate in regional and international cooperation.

We are in the final stage leading to accession to the World Trade Organization. Viet Nam is also running for non-permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council for the term 2008-2009. In pursuing our policy of international integration and in contributing to the common endeavours of the international community, we look forward to continued support from all Members of the United Nations.

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Belela Herrera, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay.

Ms. Herrera (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Madam President, I bring to you the greeting of the people and Government of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay to this Assembly. This Assembly is the broadest and most representative and important forum in the world today.

Madam President, may I express my personal satisfaction at seeing you exercise such an important function and I am sure that as a woman you will be able to add to the office an additional share of moderation and restraint.

In Uruguay, like the United Nations, we feel that it is very important to preach by example. That is why the Government I represent has also assumed, among its many tasks, that of elevating the status of women and increasing their participation in various areas.

Likewise, I am very happy to bring to you a special message from the President of Uruguay, Mr. Tabaré Vásquez, for the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, to thank him for his unrelenting efforts to drive the immense process of reforming the Organization. My country and the other Members of this house are fully committed to this reform.

On the occasion of the sixteenth Ibero-American Summit that will take place in Uruguay, the countries of the conference will express to the Secretary-General their thanks for his outstanding work. I would also like to say that the main subject of the Summit will be migration and development. Recently, we had a very constructive high-level dialogue on this subject in this house.

A year ago, during the sixtieth session of this forum, the President of our country said that the commitment of Uruguay to the United Nations Organization is both demanding and hopeful.

Our commitment is demanding because of the challenges that the current world faces and because of the opportunities implicit in the present, upon the management of which our future depends.

Our commitment is hopeful. Although we realize that there are difficulties and limitations on the international scene and at the regional and national levels, we believe in human beings, we believe in society, we believe in democracy as a common house and in freedom as the mother tongue of humanity.

The Eastern Republic of Uruguay reaffirms the principles that characterize our foreign policy, namely, our commitment to peace, sovereignty, democracy and solidarity; a firm rejection of all types of terrorism, violence and discrimination; the inalienable right of countries to have stable and secure borders and to fully exercise their sovereignty and self-determination; the respect for international law as a guarantee of sovereignty of peoples and their peaceful cohabitation; non-intervention in the internal affairs of States; multilateralism as a way of strengthening international law and as a way to organize the role of the United Nations; and the recognition of the indivisibility of all human rights, be they political, social, economic, civil or cultural, including collective rights, such as the right to development and the environment. Consequently, our country feels that progress in reforming the Organization must be achieved and we are making our contribution to that process, which will enable the

United Nations to fulfil its tasks with greater effectiveness.

Greater effectiveness should also be sought by the important recently created bodies, the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission. Uruguay is already actively participating in the Human Rights Council and we hope to join the organizing committee of the Peacebuilding Commission.

As a country that is a major contributor of troops and in support of the goal of peacekeeping, we have participated in peacekeeping missions since the creation of this Organization. The most recent example of this our active undertaking and participation in the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), which is an essential mechanism for securing a lasting peace and for restoring the social fabric of a dear Latin American nation.

Likewise, Uruguay would like to renew its active commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as agreed to by the Heads of State and Government. When I say "active", I say this as a reflection of how much progress has been made towards the goals set forth in the agreement signed in September 2005.

I cannot refer now to each of these goals at this time, but one of the main goals is "the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger". In Uruguay, by means of the interaction of various governmental programmes, we have implemented an emergency social plan that deals with the most basic needs of those in extreme poverty.

Poverty has begun to decrease, dropping from 32.6 per cent of the recorded population in 2004 to 29.8 per cent at the end of 2005. We feel that this is still not sufficient, but it is progress, not only in terms of social protection, but also in terms of social integration.

This is so because the great problems that have produced poverty in our country, as in other countries, are not just hunger, the lack of housing, illiteracy, academic failure or teenage pregnancies, but also discrimination, stigmatization, insecurity and despair, indeed, situations that indicate being integrated in society is much more than subsisting.

Social integration is essential, too, because the right to participate in social life also involves recognizing individuals as active citizens and not just as people who need to be helped.

And social integration is key, because the right that our citizens are asking for — all of them, even the poorest — is not just the right to live, but also the right to be recognized as individuals and the right to live together in society. This is called democracy and citizenship.

Allow me from this important podium and on behalf of the Government I represent to refer to three matters of particular importance for our country. One of them has to do with the facts of the recent past. There can be no future without memory, no freedom without justice. That is why, within the framework of legislation in force, Uruguay is taking concrete steps to heal the wounds caused by the violation of human rights during the dictatorship that ruled the country between 1973 and 1985. It has been difficult work and it is also very difficult to learn and accept the truth, but it does strengthen democracy as a form of Government and condition in society. Moreover, truth and justice help to ensure that the horrors of the past are never repeated.

I am very happy to inform this General Assembly that my country has taken one further step in the promotion and defence of human rights. The Uruguayan parliament has just unanimously approved a bill on genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and cooperation with the International Criminal Court.

Another subject that relates to the current situation and the future is climate change and the degradation of the environment. Uruguay is a party to the main international conventions in this area and, while stressing the indispensable international cooperation on this subject, we do particularly stress, once again, the individual responsibility of each State to actively protect the environment in its territory and waters and to make the vigilant participation of civil society a high priority.

It is not enough to simply protest pernicious transfers of polluting industrial processes. It is incumbent upon the State to act firmly to be vigilant and monitor and to impose high environmental standards on foreign and domestic companies.

Uruguay receives significant investment for industrial development on its territory, but we have very strict controls on the environmental aspects of

those investments and we apply an internationally recognized standard that reflects our motto "Natural Uruguay". We require the use of the most modern technologies available, and we monitor effectively, on the ground, the environmental effects of such ventures.

The Government of Uruguay reiterates its commitment to the protection of the environment in all parts of the world as a human right and as the cornerstone for achieving true sustainable development. In this sense, Uruguay calls upon the international community, and particularly the donor countries, to increase their cooperation in the area of the environment for developing countries and assume in a responsible manner global environmental goals that involve shared but differentiated responsibilities for everyone.

Finally, I would like to address our commitment to the strengthening of the multilateral trading system and the need to bring the Doha Development Round to a successful conclusion, in order to ensure that the development dimension is reflected in specific results and not just programmatic measures. For that, it is important to resume, as soon as possible, the negotiations in Geneva, always bearing in mind that we will not achieve satisfactory results without the elimination of agricultural subsidies, in the form of exports that receive internal support and the significant opening up of access to markets, particularly in the developed countries.

Everyone here in this Hall knows that there is no peace in intolerance and terrorism, and there is no freedom in poverty, nor democracy in inequality. We reaffirm our conviction that these threats can only be overcome if we join our efforts together and fully appreciate the wealth of our own cultural diversity, both among nations as well as within our respective nations.

Among nations, we must rely on the respect of our traditions and cultures and a broad-based dialogue among them in order to find useful synergies. And within each of our countries, we must rely on active policies promoting social cohesion that embrace our very cultural, ethnic and religious diversities. We have to move from words to acts, from declarations to action. This is not easy, but it is essential.

We are not starting from zero. The brief history of this Organization is testament to that.

But we still have a lot of work to do. It is a large task which, honestly, will never end and the results will never be perfect.

But these zones of continuity and imperfection establish the ideals that call on us to act and the commitments that drive us forward.

If this sixty-first session of the General Assembly of the United Nations is able to help us in this task, it will have fulfilled its mission.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Kalombo Mwansa, Special Envoy of the Government of Zambia.

Mr. Mwansa (Zambia): On behalf of the Zambian delegation, I congratulate you, Madam President, on your election as President of the sixty-first session of the United Nations General Assembly. It is indeed significant to have a lady holding the highest office of the General Assembly after almost three decades. To us, this attests to the commitment of the United Nations to the principle of gender equality.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome a new member to the United Nations, the Republic of Montenegro.

Madam President, I wish to pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, the Foreign Minister of Sweden, who successfully presided over the sixtieth session. He rendered selfless commitment and devotion to the search for consensus on a number of issues, including the 2005 World Summit Outcome. It is pleasing to note that during his presidency, a number of decisions were taken, including the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council.

Allow me to also pay fitting tribute to the outgoing Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, for the outstanding leadership he has provided to our Organization, particularly in his efforts to reform it into a more vibrant and accountable body. His vision and stewardship of the Organization has set the United Nations on a new course. We wish him well in his future endeavours as he leaves office. It is now up to us Member States to summon sufficient will to make his vision a reality.

The world today is faced with challenges of extreme poverty and underdevelopment, conflicts among and between nations and terrorism, which have

given rise to increased insecurity all over the world. In addition, human trafficking is on the increase worldwide. Often, innocent women and children in search of a better life, are sold and made to engage in illicit activities. That is a gross violation of human rights, which must be seriously addressed by the international community.

The 2005 Summit Outcome set a global agenda to address those challenges. Much has been achieved, but more remains to be done if we are to build a world body that is effective and relevant to the challenges faced. Indeed, as Mr. Kofi Annan has indicated in his "In Larger Freedom" report,

> "we will not enjoy development without security, we will not enjoy security without development, and we will not enjoy either without respect for human rights." (*A/59/2005, para. 17*)

The guiding principles of the United Nations Charter incorporate the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. We believe that without the protection of those rights and freedoms, meaningful development cannot be achieved.

As one of the 47 Member States elected to the newly established Human Rights Council, Zambia is committed to upholding the tenets of human rights in our country and the world at large. In that regard, Zambia commends the United Nations for establishing the Human Rights Council, and as a pioneer member, pledges to give it all the support that it will require. We commit ourselves to assist in formulating rules and structures designed to ensure a strong Council that is transparent, non-selective and non-politicized and that promotes dialogue and cooperation among Member States.

I am pleased to state that Zambia has made progress in consolidating human rights and good governance. Zambia has further strengthened the rule of law and upheld the highest standards of individual freedoms for all citizens, without discrimination based on sex, colour, race or religious affiliation. In that regard, we appeal to the international community to assist us to strengthen and build the capacities of human rights institutions and all related institutions that have an important role to play in the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Permit me at this juncture to thank the international community for electing Zambia to the Human Rights Council, with the second highest number of votes.

With regard to increased global insecurity, Zambia reaffirms that a new vision of collective security is required. Member States of the United Nations expect the collective mechanism to address threats, such as war, weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, organized crime and civil conflict, infectious diseases, extreme poverty and environmental degradation. If the United Nations is to strengthen the operations of that collective mechanism, Member States must work through the United Nations Security Council and other United Nations agencies to develop stronger anti-terrorism, nuclear non-proliferation, disarmament and crime prevention regimes.

Zambia will continue to actively pursue measures intended to curtail terrorism through various actions, including taking appropriate national legislative reforms. To that end, we welcome the recent adoption by the General Assembly of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and look forward to the adoption of the comprehensive convention on international terrorism.

Our Organization cannot afford to avoid addressing situations that threaten international peace and security, such as the recent case of Lebanon. Pitifully, we witnessed a case of the inaction of the Security Council, a body charged with the responsibility of maintaining international peace and security. That state of affairs only reaffirms the need to reform the Security Council, with regard to its working methods and the enlargement of its membership. In that regard, Zambia reaffirms Africa's well-known position on the matter.

At this stage, I would be remiss if I did not mention the Great Lakes region, which is emerging from a protracted period of conflict, followed by a period of successful transition towards democracy. The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region will hold its second summit in Nairobi in December 2006, to adopt the draft pact on security, stability and development in the region. In that regard, we need the continued political and financial support of the international community to ensure its adoption.

It is important to confirm that the peacebuilding and development process in the Great Lakes region has

reached a very advanced stage at all the three-dimensional levels, namely: international partnership, regional ownership and national stewardship. The vision for integrated and sustainable human development in the Great Lakes region is now reassured. The cessation of conflicts in the region, has already fed into the collective will to transform the subregion into a place of sustainable peace, political security and development.

Extreme poverty and deprivation breed disease. The number of people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS and the deaths caused by AIDS have continued to grow in the world today. Furthermore, between 350 and 500 million people per year are exposed to malaria, which is estimated to be the number one cause of mortality in most developing countries.

Zambia, like many of the developing countries adversely affected by those diseases, supports all the efforts made by the international community in combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. We therefore welcome the creation of an international drug purchase facility to combat HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. This will not only facilitate easy access to medicine but will also lower the costs and therefore benefit many countries, especially in the developing world.

Poverty in the world today accounts for many of the social and economic injustices that people are subjected to in many developing countries. Four years ago, a bargain was struck in Monterrey between developed and developing countries on the implementation of a comprehensive strategy bold enough to achieve the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. Developed countries were urged to support those efforts with action on aid, trade and debt relief.

While we commend the developed countries for taking tangible steps to fulfil their commitments, we call upon them to do so as a matter of urgency. It is saddening to note that six years after the Millennium Declaration was signed, the majority of our people in Africa are still exposed to abject poverty and live on less than $1 per day. Although there has been significant progress in achieving the MDGs, much more remains to be done in order to reverse the negative trends of poverty and the continued marginalization of people across the world.

We call for the removal of the unjust multilateral trade system, which continues to hamper the fair participation of the developing and least developed countries in the global market. We would like to draw the attention of the Assembly to the role of our developing partners, particularly, in the quick and concrete implementation of the Doha Development Agenda. It should be pointed out that with fair trading practices, developing and least developed countries would take a significant step towards self-sustenance and reduce dependence on aid.

Furthermore, we welcome the outcome of the Gleneagles Summit, at which the leaders of the Group of Eight pledged to increase aid to Africa by $25 billion a year by 2010. We also express our gratitude to those leaders for extending and deepening debt relief to the poorest countries through the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative. That Initiative has resulted in 100-per-cent cancellation of the debt owed to the international multilateral financial institutions by the poor countries that have reached the completion point under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative. Zambia is one such country. In addition, our gratitude goes to the other cooperating partners for agreeing to expand aid to developing countries by approximately $50 billion. Those resources will indeed contribute to the advancement of the MDGs.

Although in the recent past we have seen an increase in the commitment of aid resources and action and a reaffirmation of the principle of mutual accountability, there is still an urgent need to ensure that aid is managed efficiently and used effectively for the achievement of the MDGs. It is equally important to closely monitor the donor commitments and aid flows targeted at achieving the MDGs that we have set for ourselves to improve the lives of the poor and most vulnerable in the global community. The people in the developing countries have been listening attentively to the promises that we have made in various international forums. They continue to monitor those commitments. Their expectations and aspirations are very high. It is therefore incumbent on us to ensure that those commitments and promises are fulfilled.

The twenty-first century has been declared the century for the development of Africa. Let us therefore show true commitment to that cause. In a world where there is no true partnership between the rich nations and the poor nations, there can be no global security, no universal justice, no human rights and no

meaningful development. More than ever before, all of us — rich and poor nations alike — have to work together to create a sense of equal partnership. We all need to fulfil our commitments within a given time frame and enter into new ones in order to reach our goal of a world free of hunger, extreme poverty and disease — indeed, a world where we can live in a secure, clean and sustainable environment.

The meeting rose at 7.05 p.m.

United Nations A/61/PV.20

General Assembly

Sixty-first session

Official Records

20th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 26 September 2006, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Ms. Al-Khalifa ..... (Bahrain)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

The President: I call on His Excellency Mr. Andrei Stratan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova.

Mr. Stratan (Republic of Moldova): At the outset allow me to congratulate you, Madam, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session and to wish you every success in this very honourable and responsible position. My commendation also goes to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson.

I should also like to express my deepest appreciation and praise to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for the commitment and determination he has shown in discharging his important duties. Concerning the forthcoming elections for the new Secretary-General, I take this opportunity to recall that eastern Europe is the only region that has not been represented in this high position. In this regard, we welcome the candidature of Mrs. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of the Republic of Latvia.

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 still loom large in our memory. The fifth anniversary of this tragedy has again filled our television screens with horrific scenes of suffering and death. It has served to remind us of the resolve that is necessary to combat terrorism, which constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security.

With this in mind, Moldova fully supports the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy adopted recently by the General Assembly, and welcomes the Assembly's decision to continue, during the current session, consideration of the Secretary-General's progress report on the prevention of armed conflict (A/60/891). We consider that the specific measures in the Strategy's plan of action are comprehensive in their details and far-reaching in their insight. We need to take practical steps individually and collectively to implement the provisions of the plan. Likewise, we believe that the recommendations outlined in the Secretary-General's progress report will serve as guiding points for Member States in preventing conflicts throughout the world.

Many regional organizations have been entrusted by the United Nations, under the provisions of Chapter VIII of the Charter, with dealing with a number of conflicts that are not in the focus of the Security Council. We need a more systematic outreach to these regional organizations. No conflict in the world should escape the attention of the United Nations, whether or not it is on the Security Council's agenda.

From this perspective, we are delighted that the General Assembly, despite opposition from some Member States, agreed to include in the agenda of this session a new item, item 27, proposed by Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova —

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GUAM: "Protracted conflicts in the GUAM area and their implications for international peace, security and development". These unresolved conflicts continue to impact negatively on the political, social and economic development of the GUAM States and the millions of people living in the region. We believe that bringing the matter to the international community through the General Assembly will facilitate the resolution of conflicts in Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova, and will not, as some fear, undermine the existing mechanisms to negotiate settlement of these conflicts. In this context, I should like to express on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Moldova deep gratitude to those countries that have supported our initiative.

The Transdniestrian conflict is first and foremost a product of geopolitical interests and designs. It was unleashed with external support immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the declaration of independence and sovereignty by the Republic of Moldova. Unlike other internal conflicts generated and fostered by ethnic and religious antagonisms, it has a purely political character. The similarity of the ethnic structure of the population on both sides of the Dniestr river speaks for itself in this regard and cannot be denied.

Over the years the Moldovan authorities have put in place specific policies aimed at ensuring full respect for the human rights of ethnic minorities, in accordance with the highest international standards. International organizations dealing with human rights issues have repeatedly attested that in the Republic of Moldova all the conditions for the preservation of the cultural and linguistic identities of ethnic minorities have been created. These conditions include the functioning of many schools based on the languages of minorities, as well as the broad use of Russian as the language of inter-ethnic communication.

The satisfactory resolution of the Gagauz issue by granting special status to the region concerned is one of the greatest achievements of Moldova's national policy. It offers a unique example in post-cold-war Europe of an internal conflict settled successfully by political means. These developments, against the backdrop of the lack of democracy and growing criticism by the international community of the totalitarian Transdniestrian regime of Tiraspol, have convinced the separatist leaders to cease the political exploitation of cultural and linguistic factors within the negotiation process.

It should be emphasized here that the territory controlled by the separatists is one of the few regions of its kind in the world, one where political parties and non-governmental organizations opposed to the separatist regime are prohibited; where freedom of the mass media and of opinion is non-existent; and where other fundamental freedoms, especially those of the native Moldovan population, are systematically violated.

Moreover, various types of conventional weapons, including those prohibited or restricted by the relevant international arms control regimes, continue to be manufactured illegally in the region. The process of military build-up in Transdniestria is conducted vigorously by the separatist leaders, despite steady efforts by Moldova to reduce its military forces and to settle the political conflict exclusively through peaceful means, without giving up its status of permanent neutrality.

The Moldovan authorities are determined to find a political solution to the Transdniestrian conflict based on respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. This regional security problem should be resolved through negotiations, with the participation of key actors in the "5+2" format. The end goal of negotiations should be the drafting of a special legal status for the Transdniestrian region within the Republic of Moldova. The region's democratization and demilitarization are indispensable conditions for progress in the settlement process.

We have a sound road map for settling the conflict, the Ukrainian plan, together with the documents approved by the Moldovan Parliament in the summer of 2005. It is important that the negotiations resume as soon as possible, without any preconditions. The calls for such negotiations are strongly supported by the Republic of Moldova. Although little progress was achieved in the four rounds of the "5+2" negotiations, we believe it is crucial to hold talks rather than to preserve the status quo.

With a view to advancing the settlement process, the Moldovan authorities have taken a number of complementary actions. Thus, on 22 July 2005, the Moldovan Parliament adopted the Law on Fundamental Regulations of the Special Legal Status of Settlements

on the Left Bank of the River Nistru. This law grants Transdniestria the right to solve, independently, problems related to legal, social and economic development, while complying with the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Moldova. Moreover, the law grants the Transdniestrian region the right to have its own legislative and executive bodies, as well as more official languages.

In the same vein, conditions have been created to bring the activities of Transdniestrian companies within the legal framework of the country through their registration with the relevant constitutional authorities, which should allow those companies to benefit fully from the trade preferences Moldova has with its partners, including the European Union. That has been possible due to a joint commitment of the Moldovan and Ukrainian authorities to secure our common border. The deployment on the ground of the European Union Border Assistance Mission facilitated cooperation between the relevant Moldovan and Ukrainian services aimed at establishing a single customs regime and efficiently controlling the frontier. We are confident that this trilateral interaction will contribute to settling the Transdniestrian problem.

We take this opportunity to inform the Assembly that on 17 September the separatist Transdniestrian regime held a so-called referendum on the region's future. We condemn this pseudo-referendum, which flagrantly infringes the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, undermines the country's territorial integrity and defies democratic values and standards. The Republic of Moldova is grateful to the mediators and observers of the negotiation process — the European Union, the United States of America, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and Ukraine — for their resolute position on non-recognition of that farce.

We continue to be concerned about the tensions in the security zone. The inefficiency of the current peacekeeping mechanism dictates the need for its transformation into a multinational peacekeeping mission with an international mandate. We welcome certain proposals made in this sense, and are ready to tackle this issue, in a result-oriented manner, without delay. With regard to the military aspect, I should reiterate our concern and deep regret that the Russian Federation has not yet fulfilled its Istanbul commitments. The complete implementation of these decisions will facilitate the process for the entering into force of the adapted Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe. We also underline the need for an early international inspection of depots with ammunition in the Transdniestrian region. Monitoring of the military-industrial enterprises in the eastern region of the Republic of Moldova is long overdue.

This year the Republic of Moldova celebrates the fifteenth anniversary of its independence. During these 15 years, as a Member State of the United Nations, we have fully shared the common values, responsibilities, achievements and setbacks of the Organization. Nevertheless, we laid the foundations for a democratic society where basic human rights and the rights of national minorities are fully respected. The main achievement has been the consolidation of the Republic of Moldova as a peace-loving, independent European country. The Republic of Moldova has irreversibly chosen the way of European integration as a strategic objective of its foreign policy. We are fully committed to the idea of integrating into the system of political, economic and social values of the European Union's family. We hope that the successful implementation of the European Union-Moldova Action Plan will open up for us the possibility of elevating contractual relations with the European Union to a new level.

In conclusion, I voice our hope that the proceedings of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session will be conducted in a spirit of solidarity and with a realistic and constructive approach to the complex issues confronting the world today. The delegation of the Republic of Moldova is committed to contributing, alongside other Member States, to the fulfilment of the lofty goals of the United Nations.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mamady Condé, Minister of State and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Guinea.

Mr. Condé (Guinea) (*spoke in French*): It is a great pleasure to extend to you, Madam President, the warmest congratulations of my delegation on your election to the presidency of the sixty-first session. In giving you their trust as the third woman to preside over the General Assembly, the Member States wished to recognize your talents as a skilled diplomat and to pay tribute to the important contribution of your country to achieving our noble ideals of freedom, peace and prosperity in the world. My country, which shares common values with yours, wishes you every

success in fulfilling your mandate. I should also like to commend the remarkable work done by your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, who steered the work of the sixtieth session with great wisdom and effectiveness.

Another very pleasant duty is to convey to a valuable son of Africa, Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the highest appreciation of His Excellency General Lansana Conté, President of the Republic, for his eminent contribution to promoting the fundamental values of the United Nations. At this time, when he is getting ready to pass on the torch, I should like to express to him our deepest gratitude.

Guinea also welcomes the admission of Montenegro to the great family of the United Nations.

In September 2005 the General Assembly adopted, as the outcome of a high-level meeting, important decisions which are a road map for implementing the Millennium Development Goals and for reforming the Organization to adapt it to a changing world. My delegation is pleased with the reforms begun and the progress achieved. We welcome the establishment of the Human Rights Council, an appropriate tool to promote basic rights as well as good national and international governance. Likewise, we hope that the new Peacebuilding Commission will make an important contribution to mobilizing the necessary resources to help countries emerging from conflict.

However, six decades after the creation of the United Nations, consistent action by the Organization in terms of development, humanitarian aid and the environment is still an unfinished work. The reform of the Secretariat's management, which implies individual and collective sacrifices, aims not only at reducing the costs of the United Nations, but also at better investment in order to enhance its effectiveness. To move forward, the international community must consolidate the reforms and extend them to the principal organs of the Organization. Guinea firmly supports this dynamic, which is the only thing that can ensure the transparency, representativeness and effectiveness of its bodies. This process depends, of course, on the political will of all its Member States, without exception.

In the maintenance of international peace and security we see reasons for both satisfaction and concern.

In Africa, and in particular the western part, my delegation is happy that peace has been restored to Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone and Liberia. However, the balance in these States is still precarious. We therefore urge the international community to strengthen its cooperation with their democratically elected Governments in order to strengthen peace and to ensure the rapid recovery of their economies.

In Côte d'Ivoire the peace process is entering a decisive phase, with the settlement of sensitive issues related to the holding of upcoming free and fair elections. Guinea encourages the parties to fully cooperate in continued dialogue with a view to a successful outcome to the crisis.

The significant progress made in the Great Lakes region in recent months is encouraging.

The general elections held on 30 July in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are a crucial stage in the peace process. But keeping troops of the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) there, in support of Government efforts, is still crucial to restoring State authority over the entire national territory and, in particular, to bringing peace to the eastern part of the country.

In Sudan, we greatly appreciate the efforts of the international community, particularly the African Union and regional leaders, to promote peace and security in Darfur. The Abuja Peace Accord of May 2006 is a stepping stone towards the inclusive, comprehensive agreement that is crucial to that country's stability.

In Somalia, my delegation encourages all the parties concerned to favour the path of negotiation with a view to restoring peace.

With regard to the Western Sahara, the Republic of Guinea encourages the parties in conflict to strengthen their cooperation with the Secretary-General's Personal Envoy in order to find a political solution that is fair, lasting and mutually acceptable.

In the Middle East, Guinea regrets the fact that Israel's withdrawal from Gaza was not followed by additional measures to put an end to the occupation of Palestinian territory. It calls upon the parties to uphold the relevant United Nations resolutions as well as the Quartet road map for the creation of two States, Palestinian and Israeli, with secure, internationally recognized borders, living side by side in peace.

With respect to the Israeli-Lebanese crisis, Guinea greatly regrets the tragedy of the Lebanese people. We support effective implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), which imposes a ceasefire and the deployment of a stronger international force in southern Lebanon.

We stress the need to end the escalating violence in Iraq, in order to guarantee the country's stability and successfully carry out national reconstruction.

In Asia, the Government of Guinea reaffirms its attachment to the one-China principle. We also attach great importance to the peaceful reunification of Korea, and the continuation of efforts to preserve peace, security and stability in the Korean peninsula.

The recommendations of the Working Group on peacekeeping operations are a reference point for taking up the challenges of peace. We welcome the greater cooperation between the Secretariat and the troop-contributing countries, which has made it possible to better understand what is at stake, thus favouring an increased contribution from Member States. The Republic of Guinea regularly takes part in peacekeeping operations, and we reaffirm our readiness to enhance our contribution within the framework of the new agreements and arrangements that will stem from the reform process.

Guinea strongly condemns all forms and manifestations of terrorism, the scourge threatening international peace and security. We value the crucial role played by the United Nations in fighting it, and therefore support the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy adopted at the sixtieth session of the General Assembly.

In the area of disarmament, Guinea condemns the stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament. Nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation are two inseparable parts of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and bind all parties, without exception.

The failure last July of the United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects should not in the least undermine our commitment to combat the proliferation of such weapons and the illicit trade in them. My country is in favour of establishing an international, legally binding instrument dealing with all the related issues. In this respect, the transformation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Moratorium into a Convention on small arms reflects the determination of our States to eradicate this other scourge. Its success will depend upon the level of cooperation of member States and also the commitment of its partners.

The 2005 Summit was a decisive step in promoting the Millennium Development Goals. Guinea has made an effort to put in place more ambitious national development strategies. In this context, the Government has drafted a national poverty reduction strategy based on speeding up economic growth and access to basic social services, as well as improving governance. In order to implement this policy, the Government and its development partners have begun programmes and projects dealing with priority sectors, such as education, health, integrated rural development, infrastructure, the provision of water, and strengthening human and institutional capacities.

In the same spirit, the drafting in February 2005 of the second follow-up report on the Millennium Development Goal made it possible to assess the progress made, note the shortcomings and outline the prospects of achieving the Goals by 2015. We regard this as an opportunity to urge our development partners to swiftly implement the entire set of internationally recognized development initiatives, including the goals and objectives of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010.

We reaffirm the urgent need to strengthen official development assistance and to assure the long-term viability of debt by cancelling all public and bilateral debt of the most heavily indebted poor countries. While condemning the impasse in negotiations of the World Trade Organization's Doha Round, my delegation calls upon Member States to make a collective effort to prevent a return to protectionism, a factor in the deregulation of international economic relations.

Guinea took part with great interest in the High-Level Dialogue that the General Assembly has just devoted to the question of international migration and development. We reiterate our conviction that continuation of this Dialogue within the framework of the global consultative forum will help to identify ways and means to better exploit the benefits of migration for development, while mitigating its harmful effects.

Although Guinea is not a country in conflict or emerging from conflict, the midterm review of the humanitarian appeal, "Guinea 2006", points out, "Today its social indicators have become similar to those of countries emerging from a prolonged war." That confirms the very serious consequences of the subregional instability that we have seen for more than 15 years in my country. In this respect, our Government, through me, wishes to reiterate its appeal for greater assistance in order to help the affected regions to recover. We welcome the transformation of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund into the Central Emergency Response Fund. We hope that within the common country programming process and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, covering the period 2007-2011, the funding gaps apparent in the course of various humanitarian appeals will be filled and better provisions for Guinea will be considered.

Furthermore, deeply concerned by child trafficking, Guinea has signed with Mali and Côte d'Ivoire a memorandum of understanding to prevent this phenomenon and to improve border control.

In our common quest for a new international order, this sixty-first session of the General Assembly will be seen as one of important change for the United Nations. The reforms that we have achieved will be the beacons illuminating the path to a lasting peace and development with greater solidarity. But we must also maintain the impetus of reform and continue in our common will to make the United Nations the irreplaceable instrument to take up the enormous challenges of peace, security, development and human rights in the twenty-first century.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Dermot Ahern, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland.

Mr. Ahern (Ireland): Let me begin by congratulating you, Madam President, on your appointment and assuring you of Ireland's full support for the coming year.

This session of the General Assembly is the last under the stewardship of Secretary-General Annan. I salute his achievements and pay tribute to his leadership. He has carried out his heavy responsibilities with wisdom and dignity. He can step down from office fully satisfied with the service he has given to the peoples of the United Nations. I was proud last year to act as one of his envoys in the vital reform agenda that he pioneered.

Since the 2005 World Summit significant progress has been made. The Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council have been established. But there is more to be done. Management reform is essential to revitalizing the Organization and ensuring that the Secretariat can focus on the priorities we all share. It is in the interest of us all — developed and developing countries alike — for it to succeed.

The continuing stalemate over the reform of the Security Council leaves it insufficiently representative of the world as it now is. That serves those who for their own reasons would challenge its legitimacy. This situation cannot be allowed to continue indefinitely, so I welcome recent efforts to restart negotiations on possible options likely to win widespread support.

The true test of the United Nations is, however, not the efficiency of its structures, but the effectiveness of its actions. As the Secretary-General said last week, three key challenges face the world: first, achieving sustainable development and the elimination of poverty and disease; secondly, the promotion of universal human rights and the rule of law; and, thirdly, ensuring security, the prevention of conflict and the ending of war.

In setting our own national aid target of meeting the goal of 0.7 per cent of gross national income by 2012, three years ahead of the European Union schedule, Ireland has put the Millennium Development Goals at the heart of its aid programme, with a special focus on Africa, poverty reduction, tackling hunger, and HIV/AIDS. Last week we published a White Paper which sets out clearly and in detail how we aim to achieve our development objectives. Sustainable development must include addressing the immense global threat of climate change. Development is also the key to addressing the enormous challenges posed by migration.

Ireland is deeply committed to Africa. Despite its huge problems, there are encouraging signs. We are inspired by the efforts to shape new institutions and more cohesive societies in the aftermath of conflicts and cruelties in Sierra Leone, Burundi, Rwanda, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Ireland is honoured to assist these and other countries through their difficult transitions, including through aid and the presence of our troops in the United Nations

Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). We particularly support the efforts of the African Union to bring peace and prosperity to Africa, helping to place Africans firmly in control of their own destiny.

However, not all of our collective efforts have met with success. The suffering of the people of Darfur shames the world. There has been human tragedy there on a massive scale, with the intimidation, rape and murder of hundreds of thousands of innocents and the displacement of vast numbers from their homes. Just two months ago I visited a displacement camp myself, in Aboushouk in Darfur. I have seen how precarious the lives of the people are there and also their determination to return home to a better future for themselves and their children.

The people of Darfur have three essential needs. First, humanitarian aid must be delivered safely and without restrictions. Secondly, there must be an international peacekeeping force with a robust mandate. As set out by the Security Council, it should be a well-equipped and substantial United Nations force. I again appeal strongly to the Sudanese Government to agree to the deployment of such a force, and to all those with influence on it to persuade it so to do. I cannot emphasize enough the urgency of this. Pending the arrival of a United Nations force, the African Union force — whose continuation I welcome — should have the resources necessary to play a more effective role. Thirdly, long-term security can only be guaranteed by the full implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement.

Last year the World Summit defined the international community's responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity should national authorities fail to do so. It would be a disgrace if this major advance became an exercise in empty rhetoric. The Government of Sudan has fundamental responsibility for the safety of its own people. The international community must find ways to persuade it to live up to that responsibility, if need be including further measures against it. We cannot indefinitely stand by and watch with horror from the sidelines.

There can be no lasting development or security without full respect for human rights. The human rights of the most vulnerable are especially important. I strongly welcome the recent conclusion of negotiations on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Human Rights Council must, in developing its new ways of working, build on the achievements of its predecessor. It must demonstrate that it can provide strong leadership, particularly in dealing effectively with grave human rights abuses. The human rights situation in Burma/Myanmar remains particularly grave. I again call on the regime to move towards democracy and to release all political prisoners, in particular Aung San Suu Kyi.

The centrality of the United Nations to international peace and security is once again underlined by the issues dominating the debate in the Assembly. The question is not whether the United Nations is relevant, but, rather, whether it can respond effectively to all the situations which clamour for its attention. The Peacebuilding Commission adds an important new dimension. It must be properly resourced, and Ireland is pleased to be contributing €10 million to that fund.

The single greatest challenge to international peace and security is the situation in the Middle East. The dreadful events of recent months have again brought before the eyes of the world the continuing suffering being borne by the peoples of the region. Frustration at the long agony of the Palestinian people creates and sharpens wider divisions across the world. A comprehensive settlement of the interrelated problems of the region is more urgently required than at any time in the past 60 years.

In Lebanon there are signs of hope, but there is no room for complacency. Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) offers a path to a stable peace, and good progress is being made in its implementation. European countries in particular have responded well to the call for contributions to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) II. Ireland will very shortly be in a position to offer its own contribution to that force.

But the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians will continue to generate surges of conflict across the region until it is resolved. Any illusion that there can be a unilateral or a military solution has surely been shattered. This is a conflict about the sharing of space. The only solution lies in a negotiated outcome. It is time for a major international effort to launch serious negotiations for a settlement — the establishment of two sovereign democratic States living together in peace and security.

But to achieve peace there must be partners for peace. Ireland strongly supports the continuing efforts of President Abbas to create a national unity government committed to the peace process and reflecting the Quartet principles. If he succeeds the international community must be generous and creative in response. Israel's absolute right to exist in peace and security should be unchallenged. But, not least in its own interests, Israel must engage seriously and openly with the Palestinians. It must cease all activities, in particular the expansion of settlements, which are against international law and which make a lasting peace harder to attain.

Ireland shares the Secretary-General's continuing outrage at the failure of last year's Summit to make any reference to nuclear disarmament. It is simply folly to let this issue languish. In the next review of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons we must do better. Ireland will work with like-minded partners to keep this issue on the agenda. Dr. Hans Blix has already offered us a range of fresh and practical ideas from which we can draw. The world is right to insist on nuclear non-proliferation, but progress on disarmament would make that insistence still more compelling. Ireland, with its European partners, wants to see a diplomatic solution to the issue of Iran's nuclear programme, and we call on Iran to respond positively and rapidly to the wide-ranging proposals that have been put to it. We equally support efforts to renew the six-party talks on North Korea.

The world must also act to reduce the supply of small arms and light weapons, which facilitate the escalation of local tensions into all-out conflicts. Ireland strongly supports the negotiation of an arms trade treaty. The disturbing reports from Lebanon also highlight the need for further restrictions on the use of cluster bombs.

On behalf of my Government, I pay particular tribute to Prime Minister Blair for his commitment and dedication to the peace process in Northern Ireland. He and my Prime Minister, Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, have devoted almost 10 years to driving it forward. Credit is also due to the parties in Northern Ireland, who, despite deep and abiding divisions reaching far back into our history, are committed to addressing those divisions purely within the political arena.

In Northern Ireland the word has finally replaced the weapon as the way to resolve disputes. The Northern Ireland peace process is now at an important juncture. We have worked hard to implement the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, but its capstone, a sustained power-sharing government, has for far too long proved elusive. The British and Irish Governments are demanding that the political parties there agree by 24 November this year to form such a government. That deadline is real, reflecting our shared belief that drift and uncertainty on the political front are not in the interests of peace and reconciliation, and cannot be sustained.

If the parties fail to agree, both Governments will deepen their cooperation to deliver improvements in peoples' daily lives. But that is not our preferred option. We want local politicians in Northern Ireland taking responsibility for the issues that concern their people. The conditions for a power-sharing government have never been more favourable. It is what the people want. Inevitably it will happen some time. But if it does not happen in November the opportunity may not come again for a considerable time.

The great Irish writer George Bernard Shaw once said that making war was hard, but that making peace was infinitely more arduous. Peacebuilding and conflict resolution are ultimately about psychology — addressing fears, perceptions and beliefs about the past and about the future. A conflict does not begin when the trigger is pulled; it begins in the heart and mind of the person who pulls that trigger. We have learned this at first hand in Ireland. We know the pain and difficulty of dealing with the legacy of division. But over the years we have learned some things about building peace, encouraging reconciliation, improving human rights and the rule of law and addressing social and economic alienation.

Our own national experience reinforces what we have learned at the United Nations and from our development programme. That is why we have just established in Ireland an Irish Conflict Analysis and Resolution Support Unit. It will seek to harness our experience and help to share it. It will work closely with the Peacebuilding Commission. We do not overestimate what we can do, nor do we underestimate the difficulty of peacebuilding, but I genuinely believe that our track record means that we can bring something distinctive to the table. I would encourage all countries represented here to find ways of sharing their own experience and exchanging and enhancing

our collective knowledge of how to prevent and resolve conflict.

Since the establishment of the United Nations the world has been spared a repeat of the catastrophic global conflicts that made the first half of the twentieth century the bloodiest era in human history. But the challenges ahead of us remain grave and pressing. When we met here last year we agreed an ambitious agenda for the twenty-first century. We have made progress since then, but there is still so much to do. We must now focus on making our ambitions real.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Abdelwaheb Abdallah, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Tunisia.

Mr. Abdallah (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Madam President, on the occasion of your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session, I am pleased to convey to you and to our brotherly country Bahrain my most sincere congratulations. We are convinced that your experience and competence will enrich the work of this session and will contribute to its success.

I should also like to take this opportunity to commend your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, for his constant efforts to implement the recommendations of the 2005 Summit related to the reform of the Organization and the adoption of the two resolutions creating the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission.

I take this opportunity to convey my special thanks to Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, for the valuable efforts he has been tirelessly making to enhance the Organization's role and advance its performance, and for proving his capability to realize a consensus on several complex issues and to advance the reform of the Organization.

We note with satisfaction the important steps achieved since the 2005 Summit aimed at developing the Organization's role and work for the sake of further efficiency in its action, which will contribute to anchoring the values of justice and moderation in international relations. While insisting on the need to confer more transparency on the Security Council and pursue efforts to reach consensus on its enlargement, which will ensure equitable representation of all international parties and allow the Council to perform its main functions in an environment of dialogue and consensus, we also call for strengthening the General Assembly's prerogatives, revitalizing its role, and making it work more efficiently.

Tunisia, which had the honour of being among the first members of the Human Rights Council, reiterates its determination to participate actively in the work of this new United Nations institution and to contribute to achieving the noble objectives for which it was created, especially those related to respect for human rights in their global meaning, as agreed at the international level.

Our world today sees numerous rapid changes and developments in security, political, economic and social issues while time many international issues remain unresolved. Tunisia — which has supported the Middle East peace process since its inception and has always called for dialogue, negotiation and recourse to international legality — stresses again the need to find a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict that will allow all the peoples of the region to live in peace and security. Taking into account the hardships and suffering that the fraternal Palestinian people are undergoing, such as the siege, Tunisia calls upon the international community to provide them with international protection urgently. Tunisia also renews its call for active parties, primarily the Quartet, to ensure appropriate conditions for reviving all tracks of the peace process in accordance with ongoing Arab efforts, to help the Palestinian people regain their legitimate national rights, including the establishment of their independent State and to allow sister States Syria and Lebanon to recover their occupied territories.

Tunisia reiterates its solidarity with Lebanon following the Israeli aggression, which caused destruction and huge loss of life and property, and renews its call on the international community to contribute to the reconstruction of Lebanon. In this regard, Tunisia commends the results of the recent Stockholm donor summit.

Tunisia also expresses the hope that the fraternal Iraqi people will find appropriate solutions to their national causes in the framework of the political process, in order to maintain national unity and guarantee security and stability, which will allow Iraqis to devote themselves to reconstruction.

To face the challenges on the international scene, especially the phenomenon of extremism and terrorism,

the international community must enhance its efforts and cooperation. Tunisia, which was among the first to warn against these dangers, renews its call for an international conference, under United Nations auspices, to elaborate an international code of conduct to combat terrorism to which all parties would be committed. Tunisia has also called for tackling all root causes of terrorism — mainly injustice, the policy of double standards, and economic and social conditions that generate frustration and marginalization — within the framework of a comprehensive approach.

To implement this approach, the international community adopted the Tunisian initiative to set up a world solidarity fund to fight poverty and exclusion and to lay the foundations for a more equitable and solidarity-based vision for development. We hope that all relevant parties will increase their efforts to provide the necessary financing to operate this mechanism.

Spreading the culture of tolerance, dialogue and respect for beliefs and religious symbols in all countries has today become one of the urgent necessities for reinforcing rapprochement, understanding and solidarity among peoples and for establishing constructive international relations based on moderation and respect for the specificities and civilizations of peoples and on rejection of violence, extremism and intolerance.

In this regard, and based on its firm belief in those principles, Tunisia proposed several initiatives, such as the adoption of the Carthage Charter for Tolerance in 1995, the appeal of His Excellency the President of the Republic, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, for a pedagogy of tolerance, the proclamation of the 2001 Tunis Declaration on Dialogue among Civilizations, and the establishment of the Ben Ali Chair for Dialogue among Civilizations and Religions.

In spite of all the efforts made, achieving the Millennium Development Goals faces difficulties that require more collective efforts by all components of the international community, especially economically strong and developed countries, in the field of financing the development of the countries of the South and speeding up the transfer of technology to them. With regard to efforts to reinforce resources for developing countries, Tunisia again appeals for further action to relieve the debt burden of the least developed countries and to recycle those of middle-income countries by transforming them into investments in development projects considered to be a priority by those countries.

Convinced that the digital divide is one of the main challenges to development, Tunisia initiated the call for a world summit on the information society under the auspices of the United Nations. In November 2005 it was honoured to host the second phase of this summit, which produced important results and laid the foundations for a new world vision aimed at reducing the digital divide between countries and establishing the bases of a society of knowledge by adopting the Tunis Agenda and the Tunis Commitment. We are confident that the results of that summit will benefit from appropriate consideration and follow-up by the United Nations and its specialized agencies, as will all stakeholders in information technology and communication.

Tunisia has directed all its capabilities to elevating itself to the level of an advanced country within a future-oriented vision, the foundations of which were laid by President Ben Ali. That vision includes all political, economic, social and developmental domains. It materialized in a set of deep reforms that led to the reinforcement of democracy, promotion of a culture of human rights at both conceptual and concrete levels, consecration of public freedoms, and participation of all segments of Tunisian society in the political life of the country, all in the framework of the rule of law and the institutions of the State. Furthermore, Tunisia's economic and social achievements allowed it to attain a high rank among the group of countries with the highest human development index. That was appreciated by international financial institutions and specialized United Nations agencies. Tunisia pursues this process of reform and achievement with determination and perseverance.

Within its Maghreb, Arab and Mediterranean environment, Tunisia endeavours to strengthen relations of cooperation, solidarity, dialogue and consultation among all parties in order to reinforce security and stability, achieve the aspirations of the peoples of the region for an integral development and encourage economic complementarity. For Tunisia, the establishment of the Arab Maghreb remains a strategic choice and in terms of civilization, a gain for peoples of the region, laying the foundations for increased integration and complementarity among the Maghreb countries. Tunisia works alongside its sister States of

the region to further revitalize the march of the union in the interest of its peoples.

Our country is also keen to enhance its strong relationship with the European Union and to develop it towards the establishment of a solidarity-based partnership, which we hope will advance in a context of mutual respect and dialogue, thus serving the interests of all parties.

Tunisia, as part of the African continent, relentlessly continues to support the efforts of the African Union to finalize the establishment of its institutions and reinvigorate them, as well as to enhance its role in achieving solidarity-based development, security and stability throughout the continent. In this regard Tunisia has actively participated in United Nations peacekeeping operations, especially in Africa, convinced, as always, of the necessity to join international efforts to strengthen the foundations of peace and security throughout the world.

Although we believe that the future of the continent remains in the hands of Africans and that development can be achieved primarily by relying on their own capabilities, Africa needs more support and assistance from the international community to enable it to face the challenges and achieve the aspirations of its peoples.

The strong relationship and interaction among peace, security, development and social stability in today's world confirm the need for all nations to join multilateral efforts on the basis of the values of dialogue, consensus and solidarity. That will help in finding the appropriate solutions to the challenges posed. We believe that the United Nations remains the ideal forum to deal with these urgent issues based on the values and principles of its Charter.

The President: I now call on His Excellency the Honourable Petrus Compton, Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Civil Aviation of Saint Lucia.

Mr. Compton (Saint Lucia): At the outset permit me to congratulate you, Madam President, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session, and to express Saint Lucia's appreciation to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson of Sweden, for the excellent manner in which he spearheaded the work of the sixtieth session. We wish also to express our profound respect and gratitude to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his great vision, committed leadership and tireless efforts in promoting the noble ideals and values of our United Nations under the most difficult circumstances. We wish him and his family well in their future endeavours.

When in September 2000 we took the unprecedented step of pledging to meet eight Millennium Development Goals by 2015, it represented a belated admission that the development of every nation is a collective responsibility.

At that Summit we recognized that it was an affront to our basic humanity that so many people on our planet continued to live in conditions of abject poverty and deprivation; that so many continued to suffer the ravages of disease and war; and that basic necessities of life, taken for granted by most of us, remained unattainable by so many. We also recognized that unless we developed appropriate partnerships to deal with these problems they would persist, to our collective shame.

At this, our sixty-first session, we reaffirm our commitment to this notion of partnership as a significant modality for the attainment of our common goals. Saint Lucia is satisfied that the idea of partnership accommodates the spirit of multilateralism, which is the defining principle of our relationship within the United Nations. This multilateralist spirit must constantly be safeguarded and fortified, and that can only be accomplished by a strong and confident United Nations.

Saint Lucia takes this opportunity to once again express its determined support for the programmes of reform of the United Nations, designed as these are to create the capacity and conditions for the exercise of a strong central role by the United Nations within the international community. We salute the achievements to date, namely, the replacement of the moribund Human Rights Commission with the new Human Rights Council and the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission. We recognize that these bodies are far from perfect and will require continued attention by Member States. However, they reflect our determination to translate talk into action. Saint Lucia looks forward to continuing the discussions on the remaining items on our reform agenda — in particular, Security Council reform, strengthening and refocusing

the General Assembly, the empowerment of the Economic and Social Council and management reform.

Saint Lucia continues to believe in the wisdom of the words of our Secretary-General, who, in his March 2005 report "In Larger Freedom", opined:

> "we will not enjoy development without security, we will not enjoy security without development, and we will not enjoy either without respect for human rights. Unless all these causes are advanced, none will succeed." (*A/59/2005, para. 17*)

As we seek to develop partnerships for development, utilizing the Millennium Development Goals as the benchmark, Saint Lucia has been moving steadily towards the attainment of some of the goals. Universal primary education has been largely attained, and we have gone further to introduce a programme of universal access to free secondary education for our young citizens. Saint Lucia is in the process of establishing a universal programme of free health care, and it has made significant progress in the area of maternal and child health. We are also working steadfastly in the battle against HIV/AIDS through education, early detection and treatment programmes, and also through the provision of free or subsidized antiretroviral drugs.

All these efforts have been bolstered in a practical demonstration of South-South cooperation through generous support and assistance from a number of developing countries in the areas of human resource development in the health sector and the construction of new health facilities. South-South partnerships are workable. We need to continue to develop and widen them for the betterment of developing countries.

Saint Lucia applauds the return of Haiti to democratic governance. This long-awaited development has led to the readmission of that country to the councils of the Caribbean Community. We recognize that the road to normalcy in Haiti will be a long and tortuous one, requiring a sustained political focus by the international community. Saint Lucia calls for the speedy release of development resources promised to that country in order that its Government and people may tackle in a meaningful way the numerous obstacles standing in its development path.

Saint Lucia also welcomes the Final Document of the Fourteenth Summit Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Havana. This historic meeting addressed a wide range of regional and international issues, including the sanctity of international law, the promotion and preservation of multilateralism, the peaceful settlement of disputes, the right to self-determination and decolonization. The Final Document provides the international community with a workable road map for the development agenda far into this new century, with achievable solutions to many of the issues facing us today.

Saint Lucia notes and welcomes the report of the Secretary-General on the follow-up to and implementation of the outcome of the 2005 International Conference on Financing for Development (A/61/253). We call upon the developed countries represented at that forum to honour the commitments made there and at previous United Nations summits and conferences on trade, debt and finance, especially their promise to fulfil the goal of 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product going to official development assistance. We believe it is imperative that the international community increase its efforts to address the indebtedness of poor developing countries. It is also important that these countries address the systemic deficiencies in the global economic and financial system. These deficiencies all constitute serious threats to the survival of developing countries like Saint Lucia.

Small island developing States, such as those in the Caribbean, the Pacific and Indian oceans and the Mediterranean, are extremely vulnerable to the impact of climate change. We have already reached a dangerous level of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere, and urgent action is required to reverse this situation.

In this connection, the international community, in particular our developed partners, needs to take more aggressive action to promote the development and distribution of renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies in developed and developing countries alike. To assist developing countries to play their part in this connection there is a need to establish a global renewable energy and energy efficiency fund. Saint Lucia joins with its colleague members of the Alliance of Small Island States, and with other affected States, in calling for the international community to

address the issues of sea-level rise and climate change as a matter of urgency.

The international community must honour its responsibility for, and commitment to, the full implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. We insist on the urgent and proper mainstreaming of the Strategy into the respective work programmes of the United Nations agencies and other bodies. Those who are the largest producers of greenhouse gases must bear responsibility for the damage they are causing to the global environment. From our own regional perspective, Saint Lucia welcomes the adoption of measures for the promotion of an integrated management approach to the Caribbean Sea area in the context of sustainable development. We welcome initiatives taken to this end by the Association of Caribbean States and the Caribbean Community.

Half a decade into the twenty-first century there are still some 16 Non-Self-Governing Territories under the review of the General Assembly. Most are small island territories in the Caribbean and Pacific regions. Their decolonization through a genuine process of self-determination is the unfinished agenda of the United Nations. In this connection, Article 73b of the Charter, on the necessity of promoting genuine self-government, should be respected. We call on the administering Powers to increase their level of cooperation with the Special Committee on Decolonization, and call on the relevant bodies of the United Nations system to assist the Non-Self-Governing Territories in the development of their capacity for self-government and in furtherance of their process of self-determination.

The year 2007 will mark the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, which began the process of the abolition of slavery in the British Empire. A number of international events are planned throughout the globe to honour the memory of the millions who died during the middle passage, and those who subsequently perished under the horrors of chattel slavery in the Caribbean and the Americas. Saint Lucia joins with the countries of the African diaspora in the Caribbean, and with other like-minded countries, in supporting a United Nations commemoration in 2007 of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade.

I could not end without referring to the serious impact of the rulings of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in respect of banana exports to our preferential markets in Europe. Few in the developed world can appreciate the mass social dislocation that this decision has caused, with thousands of independent farmers, employers in their own right, left without a livelihood through no fault of their own.

Consider that for every banana farmer in Saint Lucia who has lost his or her livelihood at least six persons have also been excised from direct participation in the economic system. The WTO has become synonymous with pain and suffering for farmers in Saint Lucia. In many instances the implementation of some of the obligations has created more hardship and poverty than previously existed. Accordingly, while economic and trade policy reform in principle holds much promise for small developing countries, the international community must come to grips with the fact that the one-size-fits-all approach is inappropriate and impractical. In this connection, a set of trading rules flexible enough to take into account the concerns of small States must be enacted. The principle of special and differential treatment must infuse all aspects of the new trade rules that we seek to create.

There is much unfinished business ahead of us. It is our expectation that the members of the Assembly will focus even more intently on the development of appropriate strategies for its resolution. We are confident that under your guidance and leadership, Madam President, the development agenda of the Organization will be advanced further. For its part, Saint Lucia remains committed to the ideals of multilateralism, and reaffirms its view that the United Nations offers the best opportunity for the achievement of peace, security and sustainable development for all.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs Valgerdur Sverrisdottir, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade of Iceland.

Mrs. Sverrisdottir (Iceland): Let me begin by congratulating you, Madam President, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this session. I am especially pleased to see a woman in this important position after a break of nearly 30 years. I join those who have expressed thanks to the Secretary-General for his leadership and commitment in recent years in addressing the very serious challenges facing the international community.

Allow me also to take this opportunity to congratulate the Republic of Montenegro on its accession to membership of the United Nations.

The commitment to global partnership for development is a timely, yet sobering, theme in light of the long road we have still to travel and the setbacks already encountered. A major setback has been the crisis in global trade talks. Trade can be the single most important vehicle for global development, and we should not let the opportunity presented to us by the Doha Development Agenda slip from our grasp. We must ensure that gains from trade liberalization benefit the poor and are fairly distributed. Iceland remains strongly committed to the Agenda.

Many developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, have little chance of achieving the Millennium Development Goals by the target date, unless significant additional resources are made available. We welcome and support international efforts for debt relief to the poorest countries. We also applaud those countries that have committed to increasing official development assistance. Iceland is also shouldering its responsibility. Over the next three years Iceland's development assistance will have almost tripled in size, and we are determined to do even more. Beyond 2009 our assistance should increase even further, with the ambition of reaching the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income.

The global partnership rests on the principles of transparency, accountability, good governance, equity and commitment to poverty reduction. Iceland also attaches special importance to the rights of women and children. As the Iranian Nobel Peace Prize winner, Shirin Ebadi, so rightly pointed out in her Nobel Peace Prize Lecture on 10 December 2003,

> "To disregard women and bar them from active participation in political, social, economic and cultural life would in fact be tantamount to depriving the entire population of every society of half its capability."

We want to see more determined efforts by development partners and United Nations agencies to pursue gender equality. The work of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) must be given more weight within the United Nations. Iceland has increased its support for the work of UNIFEM more than tenfold over the past two years, and we will increase our support even further.

The mission statement of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) correctly insists that the survival, protection and development of children are central to human progress. Nobody questions this statement, yet more than 10 million children die from preventable causes every year. Iceland will further increase its contributions to the vital work of UNICEF. I am proud to say that the people of Iceland have been particularly active and make the highest contribution per capita of national societies to UNICEF.

At least half of the eight Millennium Development Goals relate to resource use and environmental conservation, that is, to sustainable development. We will not be able to eradicate extreme poverty or hunger if we cannot safeguard the environment, the basis of food security around the world. We cannot hope to reduce child mortality unless we deal with the contamination of fresh water. There is a close relationship between the health of the earth's ecosystem and human welfare, security and peace. Icelanders base their livelihood on the living resources of the sea and abundant renewable energy. Iceland rose from relatively recent poverty to affluence through the application of technological innovations and by drawing on international cooperation. We are convinced that our success could be replicated in many other parts of the world, given the right incentives and an enabling environment.

In this connection, I should like to refer in particular to two areas of sustainable development: ocean issues and energy issues.

Ocean issues have far-reaching development implications. Ninety-five per cent of those who make their living from fisheries are in the developing world. A billion people depend on fisheries for their main intake of protein. At the same time, we are seeing a rapid increase in pollution of the ocean and depletion of its living resources. That is why Iceland has prioritized this area in its development cooperation and in the work of the fisheries department of the United Nations University in Iceland.

Energy issues also loom large. While Icelanders enjoy the good fortune of having clean, renewable energy for 70 per cent of our total energy use, energy issues are increasingly becoming one of the main drivers of the sustainable development agenda within

the United Nations. Two billion people lack access to electricity. All eight Millennium Development Goals will require greater energy consumption.

Unfortunately, more energy consumption in most cases means greater greenhouse gas emissions. One of our greatest challenges today is to square the development circle, to meet our development needs while safeguarding the environment. One way certainly is to increase substantially the share of renewables in world energy demand. That is why Iceland is taking an active part in promoting renewables and new technologies through its development cooperation and the work of the geothermal department of the United Nations University. Another example of our commitment in this area is the international seminar on hydrogen use for the developing world, to be held in Reykjavik later this week. It will be co-hosted by Iceland and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Much has been achieved over the past 12 months in implementing the outcome of the World Summit. In this connection, I join others in expressing appreciation for the outstanding work done by Jan Eliasson as President of the General Assembly at its sixtieth session. We now have a Peacebuilding Commission. The new Human Rights Council has also been established. It is the duty of all of us to make sure that we strengthen its credibility and turn it into a powerful defender and reinforcer of basic human rights. Its credibility will depend to a large extent on its even-handedness.

Useful work has already been done on internal reform of the United Nations. The success of these reforms — I think in particular of the mandate review — will affect the long-term credibility of the United Nations. It is with great interest and high hopes that we await the outcome of the work of the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence.

Peace and security is fundamental to implementing a global partnership for development. In the face of the crippling effects of terrorism, we welcome the agreement on the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. In the fight against terrorism, human rights must not be compromised; otherwise, we undermine the values that we seek to defend. Torture cannot be justified. As we have seen recently, years of careful development can be reversed almost overnight by war. Conflict prevention, restraint by the parties involved and a commitment by other actors to urge restraint, rather than encourage conflict, are also fundamental to the partnership.

Sixty years ago, on 19 November 1946, Iceland became a Member of the United Nations. Iceland has since then strongly supported the principles of the United Nations as written in the Charter. With the full support of the other Nordic countries — Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden — Iceland decided in 1998 to present for the first time its candidature for a seat on the Security Council for the period 2009-2010, with elections to be held in 2008. This candidature, which was declared within the Western European and Others Group in April 2000, is based on our readiness to shoulder the responsibility of serving on the United Nations body charged with maintaining and strengthening peace and security. As one of the almost 100 smaller States of the United Nations, Iceland makes every endeavour to cultivate mutually beneficial relations with all Members of the Organization and believes itself to be favourably positioned to exercise with fairness and firmness the role of a Security Council member.

The task of building a global partnership for development is not easy. But it is the only way in which we can realistically address the challenges facing us, whether they be challenges of poverty, security, the environment or health. As Secretary-General Kofi Annan has put it, "the cause of larger freedom can only be advanced by broad, deep and sustained global cooperation among States". (*A/59/2005, para. 18*).

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Sergei Martynov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belarus.

Mr. Martynov (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): It is generally considered that the struggle of ideologies has passed into history together with the collapse of the bipolar world order. Yet in reality the world continues a painful quest for a system of ideas that could ensure its security, justice and prosperity. The 2005 World Summit and the current General Assembly debate are good evidence of this quest. Nowhere else but on this rostrum does one have such an acute sense that ideas and the struggle for them are no abstract matter. They permeate the flesh and blood of millions and billions of people.

I hope that many of those present will agree that free self-determination is the main ideology of the modern world. Is it not absolutely clear that as long as there is no independent Palestinian State, peacefully coexisting with all its neighbours, and that as long as Iraq is not free from occupation, then terrorism and extremism will remain inevitable and invincible? Attempts to solve the problems of self-determination by violent measures, whether military or of any other kind, from the outside will result only in increasing the ranks of the ruthless disciples of terrorism and extremism.

In the modern world free self-determination is not only an issue of State independence and sovereignty. It is also an issue of recognizing — not in word, but in deed — a diversity of ways for countries and peoples to progress. We must provide the Palestinians, Iraqis, Lebanese and other peoples with the possibility of building their own homes in the way they want. Any help should come only then and in such manner as they wish, not as deemed appropriate by the ideologues of crusades in some capitals. There are no clever and foolish, no superior and inferior, no righteous and vicious peoples and religions; there are just people of the planet who are equally eager for happiness, uncomplicated and dignified.

The five years that have passed since 11 September 2001 have proved with painful clarity that ideology and the practice of crusades do not bring peace and democracy. They lead to the devastation of States, the destruction of the fabric of life of entire nations, and the death of children, women and innocent civilians. They also result in an upsurge of terrorism, swelling the ranks of its followers and supporters. In the same way, religious intolerance and the rejection of the beliefs and conventions of other people do not bring spiritual harmony and unity. They cause an outbreak of radicalism, fanaticism and extremism. Encouragement of religious tolerance within societies should become a responsibility of political and state leaders.

International security and global stability are inseparable from the solution of the world's development problems. Security and development are inseparable. This is not some artificial linkage created in the halls of the United Nations. Its real nature has been clearly shown by the events in the suburbs of Paris. Are we, here in the General Assembly, and our colleagues in the capitals of the richest countries, waiting for an even more alarming signal? Are we waiting for the spiralling extremism caused by the lack of prospects for the future?

The situation is as clear as it can get. And it is clear that inadequate reflection of the priorities of development and development assistance in the 2005 World Summit Outcome document (resolution 60/1) was a serious mistake by the international community.

How can we correct this mistake? We can do so only by earnest and not hypocritical practical efforts to implement the Millennium Development Goals. Before too long we will see new proposals based on the results of the large-scale study on raising system-wide coherence and coordination of actions of the agencies of the United Nations system in the field of development assistance. Our task is to implement these important initiatives in deed.

The Millennium Development Goals are clear. None is easily achievable. These problems are too old and too deep-rooted to be solved by incremental and shallow methods. Nobody treats a dangerous infection with aspirin. A serious task requires serious tools. That is why the time has come for deep transformation of the Bretton Woods institutions. They were established in a different era and for different purposes. They should be changed and made to serve the cause of global development. A special role in making development a success and not a problem will belong to the Economic and Social Council, as the major United Nations coordinating body on development. Special responsibility will rest on the shoulders of the members of the Council.

Belarus is a candidate for membership of the Economic and Social Council for the period 2007-2009. I appeal to Member States to support Belarus in the elections to be held during the current session. The Assembly may rest assured that the Republic of Belarus will not fall short of its expectations. As a Member of the United Nations since 1945, Belarus has never wavered in its devotion to the purposes and principles of the Charter. As a member of the Non-Aligned Movement since 1998, Belarus stands actively and resolutely for the implementation of the goals and principles of the Movement and the practical strengthening of its role in international affairs.

Our responsibility and concern for the destiny of the world are sincere. There is much evidence to prove that. In its region the Republic of Belarus is a donor of

international security. Belarus was the first country in the world to voluntarily renounce the possession of the nuclear weapons it had at its disposal.

Despite all the difficulties of the transition period, our country was among the first to respond to the plight of people struck by the tsunami in the Indian Ocean in 2004, and provided humanitarian assistance to the disaster-stricken countries of south-east Asia. Nor was our country an indifferent spectator of the recent conflict in the Middle East. At the height of the hostilities Belarus invited children from war-ravaged States to come to Belarus for health rehabilitation.

The adherence of Belarus to the cause of development is also sincere and firm. Implementation of the international development agenda will be the indisputable priority of our work in the Economic and Social Council. What is most important is that we have the know-how to do it. Having been left 15 years ago, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, without natural resources and foreign markets, without a national currency and international assistance, we have achieved our economic and social objectives. They may be considered modest when compared to those of the most developed countries, but they are of critical importance as a stage in our movement forward, as evidence of what a medium-sized State can achieve in the most difficult of circumstances.

Among other hardships, we had to deal on our own with the Chernobyl disaster, whose radioactive contamination affected more than 20 per cent of our population and made it impossible to use more than 20 per cent of arable land and 30 per cent of forests. Chernobyl's direct damage in Belarus alone is equivalent to 35 annual national budgets. It is more than appropriate to recall today, in the year of its twentieth anniversary, the largest man-made disaster in the history of mankind.

Having overcome a 50 per cent decline in the economy, and having rejected formulas that the International Monetary Fund tried to impose upon us, Belarus was the first country of the Commonwealth of Independent States to restore gross domestic product to its peak Soviet value and then raise the level to 120 per cent of that value. We have created a market economy with a strong social emphasis. We have preserved free education, including higher education, and health care, as well as the high quality and availability of social services for all people without exception. We have reduced unemployment to 1.5 per cent, and we are successfully curbing inflation.

I am confident that the experience, approach and knowledge of Belarus will be a useful contribution to the work of the Economic and Social Council on the Millennium Development Goals. If the majority of nations give us the credit of trust, we will most actively and persistently work for a stronger role for the Council in addressing the development challenges. Together with those who share these approaches, we will work to reform the social and economic sphere of the United Nations. Reform measures are not working yet. Without them the activity of different United Nations funds and programmes at country level can never be effective. To continue a "business as usual" approach in these matters would mean leaving the Millennium Development Goals on paper.

There is also a large debit balance in United Nations activities outside the Economic and Social Council. There has been no substantial movement towards the enhancement of the role of the General Assembly as a principal organ of the United Nations. So far there has been no progress in reorganizing the Security Council, a key element in United Nations reform. The sluggishness of the Security Council in addressing the situation in Lebanon has not only caused sorrow and frustration, but once again convinces us of the disparity between the Security Council and the image of the world as we know it today.

Having made right and important steps in the human rights area after the 2005 World Summit, the international community should take new actions at this session. They should be aimed at a true promotion of human rights and protection of the real victims of human rights violations, and not at getting even with disagreeable nations by abusing an unjust instrument of country-specific resolutions.

As a major step towards the practical promotion of human rights and the protection of victims of one of the most acute and painful phenomena of the modern world, Belarus has, together with a number of partners, elaborated a draft resolution on improving international coordination in fighting human trafficking, and will present it to the Assembly at this session. The global scale of that challenge requires from all of us not shallow talk, but truly coordinated and purposeful actions. We see the goal of these efforts as the

elaboration of a United Nations strategy to fight human trafficking. I ask the Assembly to support the establishment of a systems-based approach to a global partnership against slavery and trafficking in human beings. Who else but the United Nations should care about the dozens, hundreds and perhaps millions of victims — above all, women and children — of modern slavery? Who else but the United Nations should encourage better international coordination in eradicating this phenomenon, which is an utter disgrace in our century?

At the World Summit many leaders spoke about the spirit of San Francisco. The spirit of San Francisco in 1944 and 1945 came from the sense of responsibility of nations in dealing with the problems of the world, not responsibility for their own narrow interests — that is obvious and simple — but for a common cause. That spirit became possible as a result of the huge disaster of the Second World War, with about 60 million deaths and the inconceivable suffering of hundreds of millions. Do we also need a huge disaster to restore that spirit? I am sure we do not. I hope that we have all learned the lessons of history.

After an era of romantic ideals and their tragic failure in the 1990s, mankind today is coming to a more elaborate perception of what kind of world order it needs. The Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Havana has demonstrated the clear aspiration of the majority of the nations of the world to move from the self-exhausted unipolar world to the multipolar world, fair and stable, based on the interdependence of diverse global and regional centres of power, to a world fit for all. The Havana Summit has shown that humanity should be humane. That should be the United Nations motto for a challenging twenty-first century.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Walid Al-Moualem, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Al-Moualem (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I congratulate you, Madam President, and your fraternal country, Bahrain, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. You are the first Arab woman ever to assume this high position. Your selection to this post is proof that the empowerment of women has become an integral part of the Arab experience.

I should be remiss if I failed to express to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, our sincere appreciation for the efforts he made to bring a successful conclusion to the work of last session. I also express our thanks to Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, for his efforts leading the Organization for the past ten years. We appreciate the constructive efforts he exerted during his last visit to the Middle East.

For decades the Middle East region has been the stage for many daunting and exacerbated challenges. It has endured continued Israeli occupation of Arab territories since 1967 and the denial of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. Peoples of our region have lost hope of realizing their aspirations to justice, peace and security. A short time ago Israel launched its destructive war against Lebanon. The Palestinian situation, in the grip of Israeli occupation, continues to deteriorate. Acts of aggression are on the rise while the rights of the people continue to be trampled under foot. Palestinians are subjected to a crippling blockade because the advocates of democracy were dissatisfied with the results of elections in the Palestinian territories.

Our region is in the grip of a volatile situation brought about by a protracted and relentless occupation. There are few, if any, prospects for change that will hold the promise of a safe, just and stable life for our people. Can we turn the current situation into a prelude to the solution rather than a consecration of tension and confrontation?

That important question is essential to understanding the suffering of our peoples. For decades they have been yearning for the realization of a just and comprehensive peace through a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict that will end occupation, restore rights, and allow for the realization of the objectives of development. That is the path to take in order to address the root causes of the problems of the region before talking about a new or a greater Middle East.

The international community must realize that continued Israeli occupation of Arab territories is the hotbed of all the problems of the region. It is the origin of the encompassing anger that consumes its peoples. I wonder, is the region destined to live one endless war after another? Can any one expect our people to draw comfort and satisfaction from the occupation of their territories and the violation of their rights? Are they expected to exalt the financers and supporters of this

persistent injustice, who can redress it only if they are willing? Is the region destined to endure a new war, complementing the war against Lebanon, in favour of a new Middle East, and recalling once again the birthpangs of bloodshed and destruction during the war against Lebanon, instead of embracing the opportunity to open the door to peace in the region?

The suffering of the Palestinian people continues and their tragedy has heightened over the years. Some members of the international community have become accustomed to dealing with the suffering as if it were a natural phenomenon, not an unprecedented humanitarian and national tragedy. We in Syria are victims of that tragedy in all its aspects and are influenced by its repercussions. We support the efforts of our Palestinian brothers to close their ranks and encourage them to form a Government of national unity. The suffering of our people in the occupied Syrian Golan continues as well and all Syrians suffer because of this occupation.

From this rostrum I salute the struggle and steadfastness of our people in the Golan and in Palestine in the face of the Israeli policies of tyranny and terrorism. It is extremely important for the international community to recognize that the deep-rooted anger and resentment consuming our region, particularly after the senseless war against Lebanon, and the continued logjam in efforts for peace, constitute a dangerous and complex situation and can only lead to confrontation instead of peace. This will not serve the interests of anyone, inside the region or outside it. We too want a new Middle East, one where a just and comprehensive peace prevails, based on right, justice, and guaranteeing the same security to all.

Fifteen years ago Syria declared that the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace was its strategic choice. It took part in the peace process that began in Madrid, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and on the principle of land for peace. Negotiations continued for 10 years but did not bear fruit. The Syrian Golan continues to be under occupation and peace remains elusive. It was clear beyond any doubt that the Israeli political will to make peace was non-existent. Peacemaking first requires political will, to be followed by the implementation of the resolutions of international legitimacy.

Israel launched a brutal war against Lebanon, destroying life and property. Thanks to the courageous Lebanese resistance, its honourable steadfastness and its national unity, Lebanon warded off the aggression and defeated the aggressor. The Security Council ultimately adopted its long-awaited resolution 1701 (2006), and my country, Syria, said it would cooperate with the United Nations to implement that resolution.

Syria adopted the necessary measures to control its borders with fraternal Lebanon. Syria is committed to Lebanon's independence and sovereignty and demands the withdrawal of Israel from all Lebanese occupied territories, including from the Lebanese Sheba'a farms. We hope that Lebanon will be able to overcome the consequences of the Israeli aggression through the unity of its people and the assistance provided by its brothers, friends, and the international community, so that it will recover and be prosperous again. I stress here Syria's commitment to the establishment of good relations with Lebanon in the interests of the two fraternal peoples and countries.

On the other side of the Syrian border, Iraq is enduring extremely distressing circumstances that are causing us serious concern as both a brother of Iraq and a neighbouring country. Syria supported the political process in Iraq. I reaffirm today our support for the Iraqi Government that came to power after elections in which all segments of the Iraqi people participated. We express Syria's readiness to cooperate with this Government in all fields. We support the Iraqi Government's plan for national reconciliation and stand ready to provide all the necessary support, because we are committed to the unity of Iraq and its people.

Drawing up a schedule for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Iraq is essential, since it will assist in curbing the violence and ensuring the safety and security of its citizens. Syria, which mourns every drop of Iraqi blood shed, repeats its condemnation of all the terrorist acts that have been and continue to be perpetrated in Iraq, resulting in a high toll among innocent Iraqi citizens.

Five years have passed since the terrorist criminal act of 11 September 2001, which left thousands of innocent people dead. I repeat our condemnation of that act and our sympathy with the victims of that heinous terrorist crime. To the American people, who were the force behind great scientific achievements

that benefited humanity, I say, "You are the victims of policies that were proved wrong in the Arab and other regions of the world." Many innocent people in places so distant from the United States of America have unfortunately paid the price and suffered the dire consequences of those failed policies.

Tragically enough, we all end up paying a heavy price when the decision makers in Washington believe that they know better and are in a better position to understand and grasp the needs and circumstances of the Arabs. They diagnose the ambitions and aspirations of the Arab individual in a manner that is tailored to their own vision.

The fact is that we, the people of the region, know our circumstances and the priorities of the millions angered by the denial of their sovereign, national rights. If anyone asked the angry millions about their priorities and objectives, the sure answer would be "We want an end to the Israeli occupation of our lands in Palestine, Lebanon and the Golan. We want to recover all our usurped rights. We want the flow of American weapons to Israel, which are sowing death and destruction, to stop. We refuse hegemony over our resources and interference in our affairs. We want a Middle East governed by peace and built on right and justice, a Middle East where people can dedicate all their energies and resources to development and progress and embrace the positive trends in contemporary human thought and endeavour."

After years of the war on terror, one asks "Has the world become a safer place?" It is clear that the war did not achieve its objective and that terror has become more widespread. That could be explained by the fact that combating terrorism exclusively through the use of force accomplishes nothing unless the root causes of terrorism are addressed. We must mobilize the efforts of the international community to deal with this dangerous scourge, taking into account the need to distinguish between fighting terrorism and people's legitimate right to resist foreign occupation.

We also believe that the war on terror has been misused at times. It looked as if it was masking the clash of cultures and civilizations, which eventually not only proved detrimental to the interests of all the parties concerned but also played into the hands of terrorists and terrorism.

Israel is the sole Power in possession of nuclear weapons in the Middle East. It refuses to adhere to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to submit to the comprehensive safeguards regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency. That poses a threat to peace and security in the region. On 29 December 2003, on behalf of the Arab Group, Syria submitted to the Security Council a draft resolution to rid the Middle East region of all weapons of mass destruction. We still hope to adopt that resolution as soon as possible.

My country joins many other developing countries that have expressed concern over the restrictions on access by Member States, particularly developing countries, to nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

In conclusion I stress that the Middle East currently stands at a crossroads. It has the option either to take the road to justice, peace and security, or be faced, even more than before, with tension and confrontation that would not be in the interests of any party inside or outside the region. It is up to the parties concerned to understand the danger inherent in turning our backs on the road to peace, not yet taken. Everything also hinges on the active role that our international Organization must play to maintain international peace and security, beginning with the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). I hope that objectivity and the desire for peace will trump other options so that the Middle East can be ushered into a new, secure and prosperous era after decades of suffering.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. José Antonio García Belaúnde, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Peru.

Mr. García Belaúnde (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): First, allow me to express to you, Madam President, our congratulations on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this session. I should also like to convey to you the best wishes of the people and Government of Peru for a successful stewardship. We are ready to work with you for the benefit of the international community.

When the Government of President Alan García took office on 28 July it found a particularly serious social deficit in the country. More than 13 million Peruvians, half our population, live in poverty; 5 million of them, or 20 per cent of our population, live in extreme poverty. Peru is therefore experiencing a

situation of deep inequity for a medium-income country.

In order to tackle this reality, the new Government has placed major emphasis on responsible State action, designing an agenda of social inclusion based on promoting investment for job creation. That agenda requires that we learn to act with greater solidarity, on the basis of civic values, with due attention given to the most vulnerable groups, so that they may fully participate in drawing up public policies. Initial action is aimed at restoring confidence in our society as a factor crucial for promoting long-term development and shared growth. In this respect, my Government is working with the social sectors to develop a culture of duty as one of the main pillars supporting Government policies and the relationship between society and the State.

The Government of Peru has made the fight against poverty a central priority of its Administration. It has also set the guidelines for its external action, in which it aims to join the other nations of the Latin American region in drawing up a development agenda to achieve growth with equity and social inclusion. In this context, we reaffirm our conviction of the need to promote Latin American integration. For this purpose we are working on strengthening the Andean Community and building the South American Community of Nations.

That is the goal that inspires us, because in order to express the common interests of our continent in a world such as today's we must act together to better tackle the challenges of globalization. A Latin America with a united voice will be better placed to tackle its common problems, such as the marginalization of wide sectors of the population, internal imbalances and social divisions. A more united Latin America can also better project the values of democracy and pluralism that characterize it today. In this framework, tolerance and respect for differences will make it possible to strengthen projects of common interest offering all our citizens true opportunities for development and well-being.

One of the challenges that our continent, and in particular the Andean region, must face decisively is the fight against drug trafficking. Peru reaffirms its firm position of combating forcefully and comprehensively the illicit trafficking of drugs, emphasizing the principles of multilateralism and shared responsibility. To that end, we have been carrying out a careful evaluation of the current state of cooperation in the fight against illegal drug trafficking. Following the principle of shared responsibility, Peru has expressed an interest in holding an anti-drug summit, so that in the Andean area we can give new impetus to the dialogue on cooperation and agree with the United States and the European Union on a single consensus strategy, which would be mutually beneficial for the Andean producer countries and the large consumer markets.

Another universal scourge that the international community must fight unrelentingly is terrorism. Peru reiterates that terrorism, whatever its form or manifestation, or its motivation, is unacceptable and accordingly must be condemned and fought. States must show an unequivocal attitude towards terrorism. Peru therefore supports the efforts being made in the United Nations to fight terrorism. Among them, we note the approval of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. We reaffirm our conviction that this struggle can and must be carried out with respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In the Millennium Declaration we set ourselves the target of attaining by 2015 various goals in the fight against poverty and in the partnership for development, goals which summarize the challenges that countries such as Peru must tackle and overcome and the cooperation that developed countries must give in assisting development, trade and financing. However, at the 2005 World Summit we noted that progress in compliance with the Millennium Development Goals is somewhat modest, and some goals seem unattainable.

In order to comply with the Millennium Development Goals, the Government of Peru has taken immediate action, including, first, reform of the State and the political system to give it more austerity, through decentralization, administrative simplification and moral initiatives; secondly, job creation through investment and the opportunities that the State must promote; thirdly, restoration of labour and social rights in order to have a more modern and just society; fourthly, policies in favour of women, youth and children; and, fifthly, civic security to give the population tranquillity and confidence. None of that will be enough if the markets of developed countries remain closed to our products through restrictions. In

this context, we call for the prompt resumption of the Doha Round talks in a spirit of compromise.

My Government's social policy initiatives will make possible a broader exercise of human rights. I refer in particular to economic, social and cultural rights, where shortcomings are evident, and to paying particular attention to the most vulnerable groups.

In this respect, during the current session we will be called upon to consider and possibly adopt three important international instruments on promoting and protecting human rights. The first two are the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples and the draft international convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. Peru urges every Member State to consider adopting these two instruments, which would give greater protection to millions of people who today are victims of marginalization. The third instrument is the draft convention on forced disappearance, which will make it possible to more effectively combat that reprehensible practice.

We are aware of the importance of multilateralism as the ideal context for low- and medium-income countries to take part in the international arena, as well as helping to find solutions to the challenges that the globalized world must face. These challenges result from the current characteristics of the international system, in which two opposing processes coexist. Thus, while the world integrates globally it is becoming more fragmented because of an increase in social inequality, the proliferation of civil conflicts and the disintegration of States, so-called ethnic cleansing, massive violations of human rights, the trafficking of people and arms, environmental degradation, terrorism and international organized crime.

These contradictory trends between globalization and fragmentation often call into question both the ability of States to govern and international stability, the major challenges that the international community, and in particular the Security Council, must face. Therefore, we need a comprehensive and strategic vision to make it possible to deal with problems affecting international peace and security. It is not only military aspects that cause crises. There are also structural factors, such as poverty, social exclusion and environmental degradation, which are the triggers of national and international instability.

If the Council does not take this reality into account it will be very difficult to prevent or resolve conflicts in a sustainable way, because it will mean putting to one side the most important variables. We therefore acknowledge the need to make the multilateral system more flexible, comprehensive and effective, in order to tackle the global challenges and threats. But, at the same time, the Security Council's actions must be based on legitimacy, which accords the strictest respect for the values, purposes and principles of the Charter and international law. With this conviction, Peru is taking part in the Security Council in a coherent way and with a constructive spirit.

Given this premise, it is crucial to strengthen the disarmament and non-proliferation regimes and to find a peaceful solution to disputes. We supported the peacekeeping interventions authorized by the Security Council, and we will continue those efforts to ensure a renewed collective security system supported and respected by all Member States, in order to tackle threats to international peace and security. It is in this context that we see Peru's participation in peacekeeping operations in Haiti, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Burundi and Cyprus. This involves very sensitive matters and arduous responsibilities, but we assume them as a natural corollary to the commitment to international peace and security that we made when signing the Charter. We affirm our confidence that the Peacebuilding Commission will achieve the objective of supporting the reconstruction of countries emerging from conflict.

At the same time, we believe that we must step up our prevention efforts at the regional and subregional levels, which is why Peru promotes cooperative security through mechanisms to strengthen peace and security structures, whose development includes the need to prevent arms races between neighbouring countries.

Peru supports reform of the Security Council to make it more effective, transparent and representative. In this process, we favour increasing the number of members through dialogue and consensus, as part of a comprehensive process of United Nations reform, in which we have already seen some progress. The road ahead must be tackled with greater responsibility and in a spirit of dialogue and openness.

I wanted to share these concerns and ideas in order to reaffirm that Peru, on the basis of its own economic and social reality and its regional outreach, as well as its profound multilateral vocation, wishes to continue to contribute constructively to security, development and respect for human rights in the world. We are convinced that the United Nations system can, with the help of all, strengthen its central role of promoting social progress and raising the standard of living within the broadest concept of freedom, as stipulated in the Preamble to the Charter.

Mr. Al-Murad (Kuwait), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Zarifou Ayeva, Minister of State, Minister for Foreign Affairs and African Integration of Togo.

Mr. Ayeva (Togo) (*spoke in French*): First, on behalf of our delegation, I warmly congratulate the President on her election to preside over this session, which encourages the Government of Togo in its commitment to value the role of women in our society. Togo remains convinced that the specific insights of women in the management of national or international affairs will make a big contribution to giving a more united and human face to relations between peoples and nations. The President can rest assured that as she does her inspiring job Togo will continue to support her unstintingly.

I also pay a merited tribute to the President's predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, whose competence, moderation, sense of compromise and character earned him the respect and esteem of all during the last session.

In addition, I pay particular tribute to the Secretary-General, and express to him our sincere gratitude for his tireless efforts for peace, democracy and development. We appreciate his commitment and his bold proposals to ensure substantial and fair reform of the United Nations.

In our quest for peace, security and socio-economic development Togo has just reached a critical stage in its history, with the signing on 20 August of the Comprehensive Political Agreement at the end of an open, constructive and inclusive dialogue. When the Head of State took the initiative to resume the political dialogue we were aware that our current stage of social and political development would not allow us to deal with all matters of discord or eliminate all political and institutional problems. It was necessary first to strengthen the dynamic of national mobilization and social cohesion by promoting a policy of openness, calm and national reconciliation.

The desired results have largely been achieved, with the effective and active participation of all the major political participants in the dialogue. Everyone was able to speak freely on the substantive problems that were feeding the persistent feeling of crisis. The frank and responsible discussions, and the conclusions reached, enable us to establish bolder conditions for reform and lay the foundations for a new covenant for the republic and for national harmony.

The conclusions of the national dialogue favour the holding of free and democratic elections. Additionally, the resolution of the dialogue regarding the need to re-examine the role and mission of the army and the other security services allows us to anticipate an unprecedented strengthening of measures to maintain public order and provide more security for the activities of political parties and various other organizations, as well as the electoral processes.

After the social dialogue — involving employers, unions and the Government, and a number of bold measures aimed at youth and workers of all categories — a milestone will be reached with the holding of free legislative elections, pluralist and transparent, in the very near future. Togo will then have satisfied all the commitments made to the European Union on 14 April 2004 in Brussels.

In an attempt to give every opportunity for national harmony, implement the conclusions of the political dialogue and establish sustainable democracy, a broad-based Government of National Unity was established on 20 September 2006. All sections of the Togolese people, in their political, social and regional diversity, are represented in it. All the changes under way in Togolese society were made possible by the support of the international community, the maturity of the people of Togo and, of course, the sense of compromise of the political class.

We are very grateful to all our international partners who assisted us during this process of peacebuilding in our country. Our appreciation goes in particular to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union, the European

Union, the International Organization of la Francophonie, France, Germany, the United States of America and all African heads of State, who have always been very attentive to what we have had to say. I wish also, and very particularly, to express to the Facilitator, Mr. Blaise Compaoré, President of Burkina Faso, the gratitude of our entire Government and people for his critical role in the conclusion and signing of the Comprehensive Political Agreement.

Consolidating peace in Togo and the success of our democratization process remain closely linked to the stability of the regional and international environment. Therefore, Togo continues to be concerned about the situation in Côte d'Ivoire. Given the many preconditions for organizing elections in that neighbouring country, there must be concern, from any point of view, about the fulfilment of the mission for which the United Nations is responsible. We hope that the resolution of those preconditions will permit the holding of free and democratic elections leading Côte d'Ivoire to sustainable peace.

Similarly, with regard to the region of Darfur and Somalia, in the absence of a much more vigorous voluntary mobilization by the international community to end the cycle of violence and the tragedy of the peoples concerned, peace will not come soon to that part of Africa.

In other parts of the world, the continuing developments in both Iraq and the Middle East are a major source of concern for the Government of Togo. Togo firmly believes it is high time that the people of Iraq were reconciled and that the international community provided all the necessary support for their Government to help it complete the reconciliation process. It should be emphasized that the countries of the subregion have an important role to play in the quest for peace in Iraq.

The tragedy that unfolded in Lebanon weighs on our conscience. Togo welcomes the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1701 (2006), whose effective implementation will permit the return of peace to the country.

At the heart of the Middle East conflict is the thorny question of Palestine. Sustainable peace in the region requires an end to the continuous cycle of violence and a climate of confidence, which would make possible talks to create a Palestinian State alongside the State of Israel, the two of them coexisting within secure and internationally recognized borders.

While the resolution of crises and conflicts remains at the heart of our concerns, everything must be done to consolidate peace in countries emerging from conflicts, or countries which, after great efforts, have succeeded in their democratization process. Therefore, the Peacebuilding Commission must play a vital role in African countries emerging from conflicts. We are pleased that it is already considering the situation in Burundi and Sierra Leone. It must also help Liberia to strengthen its regained peace and make sure that Guinea-Bissau does not sink into violence. Similarly, while we welcome the holding of legislative and presidential elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Togo calls on the international community to pay sustained attention to that country so as to assist it until its still fragile process is completed.

Disarmament efforts by the international community are still far from producing the desired results. On the Korean peninsula the nuclear question is still unresolved, and there is a need for a strengthening of mutual confidence among the States concerned. Therefore, my country firmly supports every effort to resolve the region's security questions peacefully. We believe also that the question of the nuclear programme of the Islamic Republic of Iran cannot be resolved without negotiations between the interested parties, and we call on them to create conditions conducive to such talks. It would not be wise to stop the country, by whatever means, developing a nuclear programme, essentially peaceful, for its fundamental research needs and the socio-economic development of its population.

With respect to small arms and light weapons, Togo regrets that the international community was unable to successfully conclude the July 2006 New York United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, adopted in 2001. The failure of that Conference is not encouraging for regional and subregional initiatives. At the same time, the adoption in June this year of the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials is very much part of strengthening confidence-building measures among States in the subregion. It is to be hoped that at this

session the General Assembly will seriously examine the question of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, which are a destabilizing factor for African States in particular, and a threat to the peace and security of people in general.

I should also like to emphasize the importance of our collective responsibility to counter terrorism and human rights violations. The reply of the international community to terrorism should be appropriate and should correspond to the expectations of peoples who only wish to live in a world free from fear. The General Assembly's adoption of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy is to be welcomed. We hope that the Human Rights Council will contribute to strengthening the capacity of States to promote and protect human rights by developing and implementing appropriate strategies and programmes. Accordingly, on 10 July the Government concluded an agreement on establishing an office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Togo.

The current state of the world — characterized by a considerable increase in United Nations membership, from 51 Member States in 1945 to 192 in 2006, the emergence of new Powers, the persistence of certain conflicts and especially the frequent paralysis in the Security Council — requires that the United Nations be reformed as soon as possible, as the September 2005 World Summit recommended. While the objective of reform is to make the Organization more effective and efficient, we must not lose sight of the fact that a central, urgent factor is Security Council reform. If that is not included, the reform will be unfinished business.

Decisions related to economic development and the elimination of poverty adopted by the September 2005 World Summit have rekindled hope about the will of the rich industrialized countries to assist the countries of the South to promote sustainable development for their peoples. Implementation of the commitments made would permit achievement of the goals. Therefore, the countries of the South ask the countries of the North to commit themselves not only to keep their promises to make a genuine contribution to reducing poverty by 50 per cent by 2015, but finally to eradicate it.

As the Assembly is well aware, the support of the rich industrialized countries will enable us to consolidate the efforts that the countries of the South continue to make, efforts which have allowed us to improve macroeconomic management by tackling inflation and consolidating a balanced budget. However, the global incidence of extreme poverty has not declined, especially in the less developed countries, where combating poverty is still a very difficult task.

The situation that I have just described is exacerbated by factors that the developing countries have not been able to master. They include, to mention just a few: the external debt, deterioration in the terms of trade, the weakness of official development assistance, and environmental degradation. Moreover, the HIV/AIDS pandemic presents a major challenge to growth and economic development. Major conferences organized under United Nations auspices are slow to yield results. The status review of the Millennium Development Goals, held in September 2005, and the failure of the Doha Round and the midterm review of the Brussels Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010, held on 18 and 19 September, have shown that there are still barriers to implementing the commitments made.

It is therefore regrettable that development partners have not always honoured their official development commitments to the least developed countries. Nevertheless, promises made recently, in particular by the G-8 Summit in 2005, regarding an increase in assistance and debt relief, have given us reason for some optimism. Additionally, access to markets and the gradual elimination of agricultural subsidies by all countries simultaneously, on dates set by the World Trade Organization, would contribute to the development of poor countries, since agriculture is the basis of the existence of hundreds of millions of people in the least developed countries. For Togo it is essential that progress be made in resolving questions relating to cotton, in particular, questions that remain vital for many developing countries.

My country welcomes the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, held on 14 and 15 September, during which the General Assembly dealt with the multiple aspects of international migration. We must do more in-depth thinking on ways to stem the tide of the massive and hazardous exodus to northern countries. An arsenal of repressive measures alone will not resolve a situation that is becoming more and more like a scourge.

In conclusion, I emphasize that if we are faithful to our common destiny and our worldwide partnership

based on solidarity we can realize the Millennium Development Goals. Therefore, the countries of both the North and the South must honour their commitments, thus contributing to ending the suffering of millions of disinherited people throughout the world and to promoting international peace and security.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Choe Su Hon, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Choe Su Hon (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) (*spoke in Korean; English text provided by the delegation*): Allow me first, on behalf of my delegation, to congratulate Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa on her election as President and to express my conviction that the session will be successful under her able leadership.

The desire of humankind for a peaceful and prosperous world in the new century is still faced with grave challenges. The unilateralism and high-handed acts of the super-Power are becoming so reckless as to trample on the principles of respect for the sovereign equality of all States, the fundamental basis of the United Nations Charter, thereby arousing international society's serious concern. Worse still are the invasions of sovereign States, either openly committed or disregarded, and even fanned under the pretext of non-proliferation and anti-terrorism, giving rise to the massacre of innocent people and the destruction of international peace and security.

The threats and high-handed acts of the super-Power are becoming more and more obvious, with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as their target. The United States adventurous military manoeuvres, such as military exercises and an economic blockade of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, continue to be tolerated, while the routine missile test-firings of our army for self-defence have been condemned as a threat to international peace and security. Such a reality is a serious lesson to us all that a country with powerful strength, a just deterrent, is capable of safeguarding the dignity and sovereignty of a nation by itself.

Herein lies the necessity and justness of the Songun policy of General Kim Jong Il, the respected leader of our people. The Songun policy is a sure guarantee of the ability of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to safeguard its sovereignty and security and ensure peace and stability on the Korean peninsula, and in the region as a whole, in the face of the ever-hardening, hostile policy of the United States towards it. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea's possession of deterrent power, solely for self-defence, is also fully in line with the interest of the countries of the region in peace and security and a peaceful environment.

As is well known, the Korean people have suffered a tragic history; after the nearly half-century-long tyrannical military occupation by Japan they have been living in a state of war with the United States for 60 years. Against this background, the Korean people aspire for peace more than any other country. Today there persist on the Korean peninsula touch-and-go critical tension and confrontation, rather than durable peace and security. The source is none other than the vicious, hostile policy of the United States towards the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula is not exceptional either, as it originates from United States nuclear threats. The United States policy towards the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has gone beyond mere hostility, going so far as to pose nuclear threats, even by designating it part of an "axis of evil" and the target of pre-emptive strikes, thus driving the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to inevitably possess a nuclear deterrent. The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea maintains its consistent position of seeking to resolve the issue of denuclearizing the Korean peninsula peacefully through dialogue and negotiation.

As the world knows well, the core elements stipulated in the Joint Statement of 19 September 2005, adopted at the six-party talks, are the respective commitments of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States to abandon its nuclear programme and to live in peaceful coexistence. As for the Joint Statement, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea remains committed to implementing all its agreed provisions on an equal footing. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is sure to get greater benefit from implementation of the agreed provisions of the talks. That is why it is willing, more than any other country, to hold the talks. However, the United States, soon after the announcement of that Joint Statement, wasted no time in imposing financial sanctions upon the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, a dialogue partner, eventually scrapping the

already agreed itinerary for the following rounds of the Talks and creating the present impasse.

In view of these facts, it is crystal clear that the United States is not in favour of the six-party talks and the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. If there is anything that the United States does favour, it is aggravated tension on the Korean peninsula, to be used as a pretext to reinforce its military forces in the north-east Asian region. By doing so, the United States aims to strengthen its armed forces in the region and thus contain the ever-growing, strong Democratic People's Republic of Korea and neighbouring countries within its world supremacy strategy. That is the real intention of the United States.

It is quite preposterous that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, under the groundless United States sanctions, takes part in the Talks to discuss its own nuclear abandonment. That is the matter of principle on which even the slightest concession cannot be tolerated. I take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to Member States of the United Nations for their continued support for and encouragement of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in its efforts to achieve a peaceful resolution of the nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula.

As for Korea's reunification, it is the supreme aspiration of our nation to realize it at the earliest possible date as a prerequisite to ensuring lasting peace and security on the Korean peninsula. The North-South Joint Declaration of 15 June 2000 is a declaration on realizing independence and peaceful reunification by the Korean nation itself, rejecting foreign interference. Regrettably, however, on 21 September the South Korean Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade made distorted remarks about the root causes of the tension in the Korean peninsula, without saying a single word about implementation of the North-South Joint Declaration of 15 June 2000. That causes us consternation.

It is already well known that the major factors undermining peace and stability and aggravating tension in the Korean peninsula are the United States military presence in South Korea; its doctrine of pre-emptive nuclear strike against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; incessant large-scale joint United States and South Korea military exercises; the mass delivery to South Korea of all sorts of military equipment, including weapons of mass destruction; and aerial reconnaissance carried out by the United States a hundred-odd times every month.

The North-South Joint Declaration of 15 June has not been smoothly implemented so far, because of the persistent manoeuvres of the United States, which dislikes improved inter-Korean relations, and because of the existence in South Korea of such legal mechanisms as the national security law stipulating fellow countrymen as enemies and denying even basic human rights, which is against the ideals of "By our nation itself", the core of the Joint Declaration. Those are undeniable facts.

By upholding the banner of the North-South Joint Declaration, and under the ideals of "By our nation itself", the Government of our Republic will surely achieve national reunification by firmly realizing cooperation in the three areas of national independence, peace against war, and patriotism for reunification.

For the United Nations to fulfil its mission for the maintenance of international peace and security, practical measures should be taken to reject unilateralism and high-handed acts that block the establishment of equitable and just international relations. Furthermore, the United Nations should be democratized so that all international issues are resolved in conformity with the common interests of Member States.

In this regard, we are of the view that one of the reasonable ways to effect that is to hand over from the Security Council to the General Assembly the power to pass resolutions on issues directly linked to international peace and security, such as the use of force. It is also imperative to ensure that the Security Council, responsible for international peace and security, strictly observe the principle of fairness in its activities. It should be accountable to the General Assembly by making a real contribution to international peace and security, not a means for certain countries to legalize their strategic interests.

The fact that the Security Council remains indifferent to the infringement of sovereignty and the massacre of civilians in Arab territories — such as the United States invasion of Iraq and Israel's aggression in Lebanon — is a typical example of the irresponsibility, unfairness and double standards in its activities. The reform of the Security Council now under consideration should focus on ensuring fairness

in its activities, first and foremost, and ensure that the non-aligned and developing countries, which make up the overwhelming majority of Member States, are fully represented.

With regard to expansion of the permanent membership of the Council, a country like Japan, the war criminal which invaded Asian countries and massacred innocent people, but which has been distorting its aggressive history instead of liquidating it, should never be allowed to become a permanent member.

The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will continue to develop relations of friendship and cooperation with all Member States that respect its sovereignty, in accordance with the ideals of its foreign policy — independence, peace and friendship — and will make an active contribution to the efforts of international society to achieve world peace and security and sustainable development.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Sven Jürgenson, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Estonia.

Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia): I begin by congratulating Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalaifa on her assumption of the office of President of the General Assembly. We have full confidence in her and wish her every success. I should also like to praise Foreign Minister Jan Eliasson for his effective leadership during the Assembly's sixtieth session, which achieved truly noteworthy results.

I also warmly welcome the Republic of Montenegro as the 192nd Member of the United Nations.

The United Nations confronts huge tasks. There has already been remarkable progress in certain reform areas, such as the establishment of the Human Rights Council, the Central Emergency Response Fund and the Peacebuilding Commission. We also attach great importance to the launching of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which calls for enhanced United Nations measures to deal with terrorism and for the better coordination of such efforts.

Estonia is strongly committed to promoting peace and security throughout the world. We have been following developments in the Middle East with concern and compassion. The recent events have once again demonstrated that, in addition to the need to secure lasting peace, there is a need for prompt action and generous contributions from the international community to resolve humanitarian crises. Estonia has not been a bystander. We have been responding to the dire needs of the people in Lebanon and have provided assistance to the Iraqi people so that they can rebuild their country.

Estonia continues to actively support the United Nations in promoting peace and security, just as we support the Organization's important role in international development. We remain convinced that the United Nations is an answer to both current and future threats and divisions in the world. As we fully subscribe to the comprehensive statement delivered by the President of Finland on behalf of the European Union, let me briefly highlight some aspects of global partnership to which we attach great value.

One of the main aims of the Millennium Development Goals is to develop a global partnership for development. That encompasses a commitment to good governance and the efficient functioning of democratic institutions, as well as to fully respecting human rights and the rule of law for the sustainability of development efforts. As was emphasized in the Final Document of the 2005 World Summit, no country can tackle today's complex challenges alone. While all nations bear the principal responsibility for their own development, their individual efforts should be supported by concrete global actions and programmes. Partnership is truly a central element in everything we do.

Joint global action is most urgently needed when a disaster hits a country or a whole region. For a timely and efficient response from the international community, a well-coordinated and properly resourced global disaster relief system is required. Estonia gives increasingly high priority to the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance at the global level, and finds it important to further strengthen the United Nations humanitarian response capabilities. The first year of the Central Emergency Response Fund has been a promising step towards a balanced and more responsive international humanitarian system, although many challenges remain. We are committed to further increasing our financial contribution to the United Nations humanitarian system disaster relief assistance.

In this regard, it is important to always ensure that disaster relief and all other development activities

favour environmentally sustainable solutions. Environmental sustainability is an urgent, but at the same time long-term, task which demands common action. Estonia attaches great importance to the need for coordination and coherence in the field of environment-related activities, and supports the creation of a more coherent institutional framework within the United Nations.

The fulfilment of the internationally agreed development goals calls for the engagement of not only Governments and intergovernmental bodies; the commitments made at major conferences cannot be implemented without cooperation with local institutions, the private sector and non-governmental organizations. Our experience clearly demonstrates that non-governmental organizations can play a crucial role in effective development cooperation. In many cases civil society institutions are much more efficient in establishing dynamic working relationships with non-governmental organizations of partner countries than government institutions. The cooperation with non-governmental organizations has been remarkably advantageous in such sectors as sustainable development and information and communication technology, as well as e-governance.

This brings us to another area of cooperation — using information and communication technology to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Since my country has been notably successful in employing new information and communication technologies, as well as in carrying out extensive reforms, we shall continue to increase our input into overall development in this field.

There is also a need to reinvigorate and reform the United Nations. Estonia is ready to contribute to the best of its ability to the development of a comprehensive information and communication technologies strategy for the whole United Nations structure. All these issues — information technology, sustainable development and humanitarian and disaster relief — are also on the agenda of the Second Committee, which will be chaired by the Permanent Representative of Estonia during this sixty-first session. We will do our utmost there to see to the effective promotion of the matters I have mentioned — and, of course, all other crucial matters before the Committee.

We must remain strongly committed to respect for the rule of law and our rights and dignity as human beings. Indeed, if we want human rights to form one of the three main pillars of the United Nations, alongside security and development, it is essential to implement both the letter and spirit of resolution 60/251. We expect the Human Rights Council to be strengthened and become an authoritative institution, and we expect human rights issues to gain equal standing with other major items on the United Nations agenda. This first year of the existence of the Human Rights Council is a year of transition and capacity-building. Estonia's vision encompasses the establishment of an operational body reinforced with special procedures and a new efficient and universal mechanism, which monitors individual countries, with non-governmental organizations as essential partners.

We should also make sure that the rights of indigenous peoples remain an integral part of human rights and continue to be a matter of substance for the Human Rights Council. Adopting the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples during the current session is of great importance for the millions of indigenous peoples worldwide. It is crucial that it be adopted at a plenary meeting of the General Assembly this year. Its implementation could be a major step towards eliminating the widespread human rights violations suffered by many indigenous peoples. The Human Rights Council could also host a forum for dialogue where the representatives of indigenous peoples, States and a special rapporteur could discuss the issues enshrined in the Declaration.

Another new instrument that needs to be adopted by the General Assembly and implemented by States as soon as possible is the draft convention on enforced disappearances — a recurrent phenomenon that must be fought against. It is essential that it be adopted at the current session so that States can start to sign and ratify it at the beginning of next year in Paris.

The Millennium Development Goals are also intended to promote gender equality and empower women worldwide. That includes, of course, the United Nations. Estonia shares the vision that the role of women within the decision-making system of the United Nations should be increased. As the General Assembly is to decide on the next Secretary-General this year, we support the proposal to consider Mrs. Vaira Vike-Freiberga as a candidate. Thus the President of Latvia could be the first woman to head

the United Nations in its 60 years of existence. Our commitment must be reflected in our decisions. The time has come to have more representatives from central and eastern Europe in high-ranking posts in the United Nations. I believe we are ready to make history.

Before finishing, I should like to express my deepest respect for the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan. We appreciate his dedication and personal determination in addressing the enormous challenges of the twenty-first century and shaping our common future. During nearly 10 years of service he has held mankind's universal values high and led the United Nations with true vision.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.